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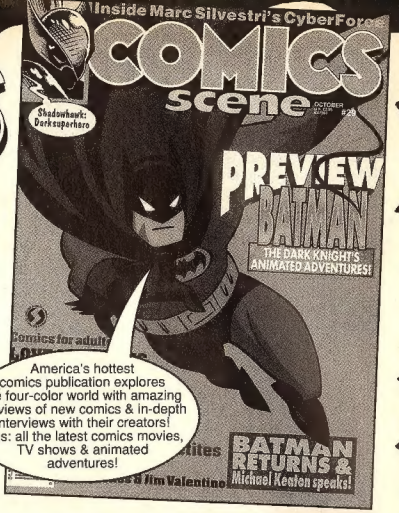
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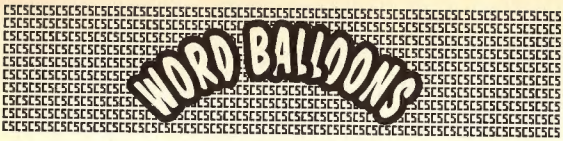


# 10 Ways You Can Save Comics

In case you hadn't noticed, there's always something awfully, terribly, bad happening in the real world. Civil wars. Homelessness. The AIDS plague. Racial incidents. Head-on collisions. Airplane crashes. And, yet another disgruntled postal employee on a stamp-induced rampage.

There's always someone willing to give us all this bad news. That's especially true here in New York City, where all the local TV half-hour newscasts feature 25 minutes of bad news, plus sports and weather.

The sheer awfulness of it all can get pretty depressing. And, that's certainly one of the reasons that we read comics—to escape, for 22-odd pages of four-color excitement, into a fantasy world where the bloodthirsty vigilantes never deliver mail (even part time), where good triumphs (mostly) over evil, where even TV weathermen are intelligent.

This summer, as you'll see this issue, there are a great many new universes a'borning, expanding further the boundaries of our graphic fantasy worlds. There are countless other new comics and comics companies. As Kim Howard Johnson outlined last issue in his "Crisis of Infinite Comics" essay, this unprecedented abundance of four-color fantasy will eventually result in some awfully, terribly, bad realities: Not every one will survive.

Well, we've been debating these dire predictions, and we've come up with 10 things that *you* can do to help save a part of the comics world.

**1) Read the comics you buy.** Despite the magical price guides which promise almost-instant riches, comic books were *never* intended as Wall Street-size investments. They're supposed to be entertainment. This plague of senseless, irresponsible price guides is spawning an environment that could truly destroy the field, but that's another word balloon, isn't it?

**2) Buy only one copy of what you read.** Tired of the cover gimmicks that "force" you to pick up more copies? Want money left over? Just buy one.

**3) Turn your friends on to comics.** It's always OK to buy two copies of anything, *if* you're going to give that other copy to someone who doesn't yet read comics regularly. Maybe he or she will enjoy them as much as you do.

**4) Do give comics away.** Comics subscriptions are a great present (it's like giving someone 12 separate gifts, doled out in regular monthly installments). Birthdays and holidays provide the perfect occasions. Don't want to deal with subscriptions? It's just as much fun to gift wrap a graphic novel, a trade paperback edition of classic tales, a hardcover collection of nifty comics strips or (where available) a gift certificate good at your local comics shop.

**5) Try something new for a change.** Do you have a few bucks left over from your weekly purchases that you don't know what to do with? Ask the store clerk or a friend. Take a shot. Buy any comic you've never tried before. It's like sampling another kind of ice cream. Maybe you'll find a flavor you never thought you would like, and you don't just like it, you *love* it.

**6) If you don't like a comic, don't buy it.** Don't feel pressured into a purchase by "investment opportunities," polybagging, cover gimmicks, cameo guest shots by popular characters or anything else. As human beings, we are free to do what we wish (as long as we observe legal and societal rules, or are willing to suffer the consequences of our actions). No one can make you buy a comic book (or for that matter, a magazine about comics). You simply *do not* have to buy it if you don't *want* to do so.

**7) Find something you like and stick with it.** What you read is up to you. And, like ice cream, everyone's taste is different. Only a few people love chocolate *and* vanilla *and* strawberry *and* broccoli.

**8) Patronize your local comics store(s).** They're the specialty merchants who *really* know the field. They stock as many titles, graphic novels, trading cards, posters, T-shirts and such as they can. And, they cater to fans because that's their job, their mission, their life.

**9) Subscribe.** If you can't find everything you want at your comics shops or, sadly, there are no stores near you, trust to the mails or the subscription services, which also exist to serve you.

**10) And even if you don't read comics or magazines about them, read.** Read something. Read *anything*. That's the *most important* thing you can do to save this world or any other: **Just read.**

*—David McDonnell/Editor*

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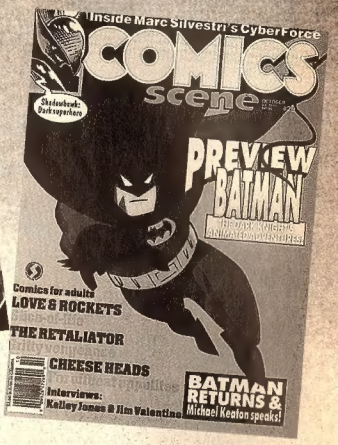

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So, how about it?
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*Well, we did do this. About six times. In CS #34, Kirby (as well as Roy Thomas and Tony Isabella) discussed the new Topps titles. In past issues, Kirby and Joe Simon talked about Captain America (CS #14; a second, different article ran in CS YEARBOOK #1) and Fighting American (CS #11). And other Kirby interviews? Look to 1992's CS SPECTACULAR #6 and this summer's CS YEARBOOK #2 (on sale July).*

...OK guys, this is the first time I've ever written to you and I have a bone to pick! Your magazine is one of the best ever on the comic book industry. I look forward to every issue because of the quality and information.

My favorite part are the articles that showcase the artists that actually draw the comics. You've had some of the best in your magazine. Now here's the bone that I have to pick with you: Of all the artists that you've featured in your magazine, I haven't seen perhaps the greatest of them all!

I'm talking about Jack Kirby! How could you have all these other artists featured and not do a very comprehensive up-to-date article dedicated to the king? You can right this wrong by publishing an article that covers all the new creations that Kirby has about to come out. His return to comics after all of his career achievements is very significant! Kirby is the first pioneer of the new breed of comic artist seeking creative control.

Art: Robert J. Bennett

...I would like to see *Flash* producers/*Rocketeer* writers Paul DeMeo and Danny Bilson attempt a live-action, first-run syndicated *Shazam!* TV series. Not to offend any Trekkers out there, but if any series could break the *Star Trek* monopoly of first-run syndication, it's *Shazam!* Why? Well, it's the one comic book feature to blend off-the-wall comedy with dark, gripping drama, and thrilling action/adventure with outlandish sight gags. Find that perfect balance and you've got a guaranteed blockbuster hit series. A good blueprint for the TV show is my own personal favorite Captain Marvel adventure, *Shazam!* #34. In that issue you get the whole spectrum, from Marvel hovering in the air, as if in a Contour Lounger, making wisecracks after shrugging off Captain Nazi's powerful weapon, to the very intense Batman-like drama of Freddy Freeman planning his revenge against Captain Nazi.

Art: Ernie J. Stiner

The casting is also very important. For the leads of Billy Batson and Capt. Marvel, only two unknowns who bear strong resemblances to the drawings of Billy and Cap would do the series justice. But for the supporting characters, more recognizable stars would be a must. My wish list: *Mr. Belvedere*'s Brice Beckham as Freddy Freeman/Capt. Marvel Jr.; Chuck McCann as Uncle Dudley Batson; either Billy Barty or Henry Gibson as Dr. Sivana; Burgess Meredith as Shazam; Tim Conway as Mr. Tawny; Frank Gorshin as Sterling Morris; *Clairissa Explains It All*'s Melissa Joan Hart would be a charming Mary Batson/Marvel—or if it would be more logical, in a TV sense, to make Mary an older sister, the perfect choice would be either Christina Applegate, Ami Dolenz or *Out of This World*'s Christina Nigra.

I hope this letter may have set the wheels in DeMeo and Bilson's heads in motion. I can picture a classic scene now: It's the pilot, Elvis' "King of the Whole Wide World" is playing in the background, Billy, worried about providing for his sister and uncle, comments to Freddy; "Y'know, sometimes I wish I had a magic word that would make everything all right." Then, off he goes to sell his newspapers by the subway station.

Lee Solomon
Sterling Hts, MI

Art: Paul Ivy

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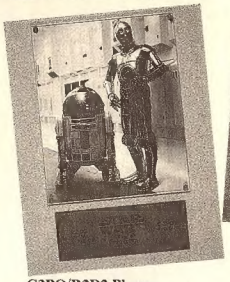

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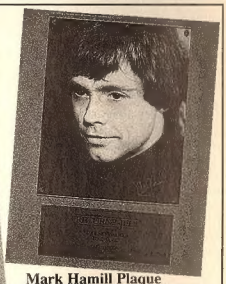

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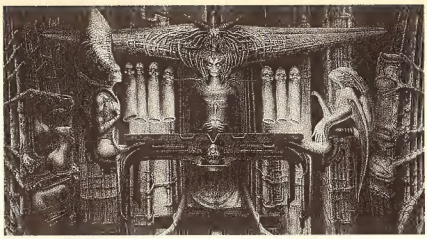

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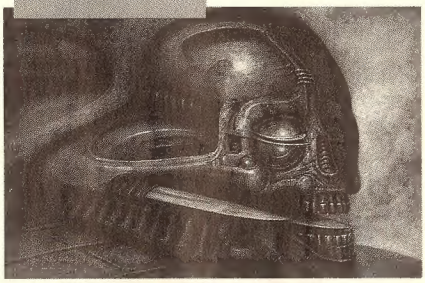

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# OUT FOR BLOOD

***Bloodshot is different from other heroes. And he's got a bigger gun.***

By HARLEY JEBENS

There currently are a great many comic characters running around toting big guns nowadays. You've got the Punisher, Nomad, Law Dog, Deathlok and all their cohorts at Marvel, Deathstroke and his ilk at DC, Judge Dredd and the Retaliator from independent companies. With all this run-and-shoot activity going on, who would have thought there would be the need for a comic chronicling the adventures of yet another guy with a loaded weapon, an excess of testosterone and time to kill?

Kevin VanHook and his cohorts at Valiant comics, that's who. And though Bloodshot—Valiant's newest and perhaps most blood-soaked hero—bears a resemblance to these other violent characters (he *is* a big guy with weapons that have a tendency to go off, after all) there's plenty to separate him from the rest of his big gun-totin' brethren.

Art: Don Perlin/John Dixon

Taking over for the Eternal Warrior, Bloodshot goes back to England and joins up with Neville Alcott in "almost a James Bondian organization."

Art: Don Perlin/John Dixon

For one thing, it's not testosterone coursing through his veins. It's nanites.

VanHook is the writer on the *Bloodshot* series, and he says of his protagonist, "Bloodshot has the ability to heal very quickly because of the nanites—this silicone-based computerized blood. It's actually microcomputers, nano-computers that flow in what *was* his bloodstream—that give him the ability to control his

All Bloodshot & Eternal Warrior Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Voyager Communications, Inc.

Art: Don Perlin/John Dixon

**The hero's first assignment for Neville's organization concerns a series of plane crashes which end up being a "galactic cover-up."**

metabolism and everything about his body. So, if he's injured, the nanites are dozens of times more efficient than our own natural systems in terms of fighting off disease or infection. They can help drag out bullets to actually help him rid the body of any foreign matter.

"He can take the risk of getting shot because he knows he'll heal. He's not an immortal per se, but he has such complete control of his body that it would be tough to put him down for the count."

Bloodshot used to be Angelo Mortalli, a Mafia hit man. Then, he crossed the wrong people, and was framed for murder. Turning state's witness, Mortalli was betrayed again and sold out to a Japanese conglomerate working on Project Rising Spirit—an attempt to create genetically enhanced bodyguard/assassins. (*Bloodshot* #0, due out this fall, written and pencilled by VanHook, delves into Mortalli's past a bit more, revealing Bloodshot's full origin.) Even though the origin may seem similar to that of other gun-totin' heroes, VanHook stresses the differences between Bloodshot and those other tough characters.

"Many of the big gun-type characters are out for, in the Punisher sense, they're out to destroy the bad guys," he says. "It's a real overwhelming desire to crush the evil. That's *not* really Bloodshot's goal here.

**Bloodshot's "not really clear whether this is something he should be doing," says writer Kevin VanHook.**

"If Project Rising Spirit had had its way, they would have developed an incredibly elite task force that would have been bodyguard/assassins, immortal killing machines. But things didn't go their way. Bloodshot was set free by our Geomancer character and ended up becoming a hero and fighting that group.

"Bloodshot *is* a good guy," VanHook says. "He's really trying to be a hero in this world.

"He had run-ins with the Mafia because they had sold him out. It wasn't a situation where it was purely vengeance. He was on a quest for information and he was attacked along the way. I'm not saying that he's not bloodthirsty at times; the nanites still have some of their original Rising Spirit programming. Whenever he gets attacked, or when he gets provoked or does battle, that stuff comes to the surface. And there's an element that *does* like the fight. But he has a different direction [than the other guns 'n' guts heroes.]"

VanHook says, "Bloodshot is unique in the sense that he's basically a guy who had his life stolen away from him, his memories, his past. He was really yearning to find out what it was. That was his all-consuming passion—trying to find his past. [That quest occupied the series' first five issues.] And then when he did discover his past, he found out he was a scumbag, a Mafia hit man. He was a 'Goodfella' kind of guy and really *not* a nice person. So he's yearning now to take advantage of his second chance and move on. There's a running theme in some of my work of a renewal and a second chance."

Nonetheless, VanHook says that Bloodshot's popularity is due, in part at least, to the "big gun factor." But he adds, "On the other hand, people who love the *Punisher* books and so forth want somebody who's very simple, who sees things in black and white, good-bad, kill-let 'em live type of thinking. And that's fine. That's a type of character. But what we have with Bloodshot is a character who sees the greys a bit more. He's not really quite clear whether this is something he *should* be doing. He's disgusted by his own programming, by the blood that's trying to make him kill. At the same time, he's put in situations where he's not likely to be able to let everyone walk away. I think that his sense of humor is part of [the reason for his popularity]; he looks interesting. There's not anybody else out there with that type of look—that big Frankenstein-looking guy with a big red dot on his chest. Those are the things that I find interesting."

Art: Don Perlin/John Dixon

Art: Don Perlin/John Dixon

**Says VanHook, "Bloodshot is a good guy. He's really trying to be a hero in this world."**

VanHook began his comics career about 10 years ago as an illustrator for Pacific and Marvel Comics, then worked on the short-lived *Newstralia* series. He created *Frost the Dying Breed*—a series about a mercenary named Jack Frost (which he discussed in CS #19)—for Caliber in 1986, then came on board at Valiant a year ago. Starting as production manager, he gradually became an editor. He's now Valiant's executive editor. Currently, he edits *Rai and the Future Force, Magnus: Robot Fighter* and *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter.*

Don Perlin is *Bloodshot*'s penciller. VanHook says of his collaborator, "We toss ideas around. Don is a big action fan, so he's pushing for that aspect. He was pushing the Mafia aspects."

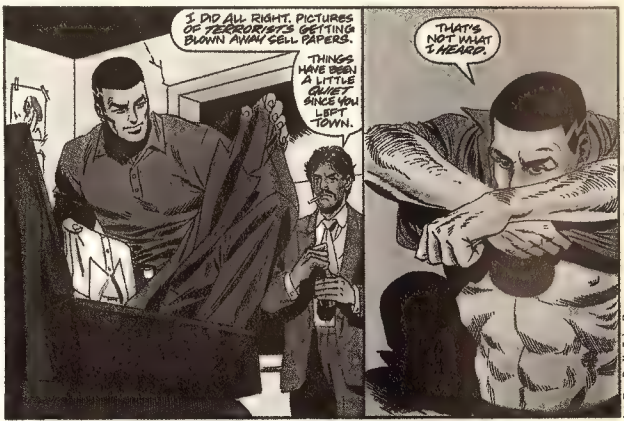
Valiant's universe is a very integrated one. And so it is that Bloodshot's history—and future—is intimately connected to that of other Valiant heroes. His blood flows literally through Rai (from *Rai and the Future Force*) in the year 4002. Geoff the Geomancer, who set Bloodshot free, will be one of the stars of Valiant's *Secret Weapons* series.

The writer says, "After a good portion of the Rising Spirit projects had been done, Geoff broke in and freed Bloodshot, because Geoff realized that this wasn't the way fate was meant to play out its hand for Earth. Bloodshot would have to become a defender of things. And if things had kept going the way they were, Bloodshot would have ended up being just a killing machine. Geoff knew that eventually Bloodshot would inspire Rai's creation years later.

"In *Secret Weapons* this fall, we have a pretty elaborate storyline dealing with Iwatsu, the old man who's the head of the Japanese group. That storyline will deal with some of the motivation for him doing this type of operation with these Bloodshots. We've established in *Bloodshot*'s first issue that there are other Bloodshot-type experiments, but they don't live very long at all. The idea being that the candle that burns twice as bright burns half as long. But it worked on Bloodshot due to the fact that he was a latent harbinger. He wasn't just 'a guy.' The odds were incredible, but it was just this particular combination that made this work in *this* man."

The first time Bloodshot appeared in costume was in *Eternal Warrior* #4. Gilad (the Eternal Warrior) repeated the favor and guest-starred in *Bloodshot* #4 and #5, setting up the nanite warrior's future activities.

VanHook says, "The Eternal Warrior is the fist and the steel of the Earth. And the Geomancer is the eyes, the seer. Gilad's ultimate responsibility is to Earth and to fate, to destiny—that sort of thing. What he has to do is *that* foremost. And secondly, he has been dealing with Neville and with this organization in Britain—almost a James Bondian organization, involved in intelligence gathering, wetwork activities and things like that. Gilad is no longer able to spend much time on


I DID ALL RIGHT. PICTURES OF TERRORISTS GETTING BLOWN AWAY SELL PAPERS.
THINGS HAVE BEEN A LITTLE QUIET SINCE YOU LEFT TOWN.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT.

Layout & Design: Jim McLarnon

Art: Don Perlin/John Dixon

**His first trip to the U.K. garnered Bloodshot a partner of sorts in Malcolm, a sleazy photojournalist. Each gets something from the other.**

Solar Art: Trademark Western Publishing Company, Inc.

Art: Peter Gray/Stan Drake

**Of his other writing chores, Van Hook notes that "Solar is much more of a philosopher and much more somber about things."**

MAYBE YOU SHOULD TRY TALKING TO A GUY BEFORE YOU KILL HIM.
I'VE LEARNED THAT MUCH, AT LEAST...
IT'S MY BLOCK HELPS ME CONTROL THE HEALING PROCESS
YOU MISSED ANY VITAL ORGANS. IT DOESN'T FEEL GOOD, BUT I CAN DEAL WITH IT.
E YOU

Art: Don Perlin/John Dixon

that, because of Master Darque's involvement with the world. [Master Darque is the arch-nemesis of most of the Valiant Universe heroes.] Gilad must devote his attention to that fight. Bloodshot actually takes Gilad's position in the espionage agency, the big group with Neville Alcott. So, Bloodshot goes back to Britain [where *Bloodshot* #1 began] in issue #6.

"Right off the bat, he's thrown into a situation where there have been several international flights that have blown up, or have crashed, or have had accidents. It turns out that they're all linked. They all had one thing in common; they all had the weaponer's agents that we have shown, the men in white suits who sell guns and so forth, on each of those planes. And it will turn out that the accidents were all just a galactic cover-up for someone trying to steal something. I say 'galactic' to give an idea of the scope," VanHook notes. "It's a really *big* cover-up. Bloodshot is sent in to find out who's doing it. And through the course of that, we'll introduce an exciting new character, who may get his own book towards the year's end.

**"Bloodshot has a sense of humor," notes VanHook. "He's willing to take chances that the others might not."**

"*Bloodshot* will take on an international feel. It did originally with the first issue, which we set in England. And this next storyline has him going through France and various places... Taiwan, I believe. We may have stories in the Netherlands or wherever. The cause of this is that this group of Neville's isn't specifically a British agency, it's more or less a coalition of nations, an extension of various peacekeeping forces.

"We're going to do a storyline going into detail on Project Rising Spirit, bringing a sort of resolution to that end of things. That will tie in with *Secret Weapons*."

The future holds other twists and turns for Bloodshot. "Malcolm [Bloodshot's reluctant ally, seen in #1] has been keeping the apartment in England rented, keeping the squatters out for Bloodshot," the writer explains. "I would describe their relationship as an antagonistic friendship. Bloodshot is at once both disgusted and fascinated by Malcolm, this sleazy, yellow journalistic photographer. He's the kind of guy who would sell out his mother, but at least he would get a good price. Their relationship is definitely a give-and-take, but Malcolm tends to do more of the taking. Malcolm supplies Bloodshot with informers and things, and what Malcolm gets out of it is tips on places to go where stories are happening, so he can make a few bucks. Most of the time, Malcolm just tries to drink himself into oblivion.

I KNEW ABOUT THE ACCIDENT, BUT I THOUGHT IT KILLED HIM.
I'M AFRAID HE'S NOT IN VERY GOOD SHAPE. HIS PRIVATE PLANE WENT DOWN. AND... WELL, YOU PROBABLY KNOW ALL THIS.
PROBABLY SHOULD HAVE. HE'S BEEN IN A COMA EVER SINCE HE WAS FISHED OUT OF THE ATLANTIC.
HIS FAMILY'S QUITE WEALTHY. FLEW HIM UP YESTERDAY SO HE'D GET THE BEST POSSIBLE CARE.
HAVE YOU DONE A PRINT? I LOT FINGERPRINTS.
THERE ARE NO FINGERPRINTS. HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
I HATE TO BE SURE.
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?! GET AWAY FROM MY PATIENT!
DR. KANE, HE JUST--!
CALL SECURITY, MISS HOWARD!
Art: Mark Moretti/John Dixon

"The Eternal Warrior is probably the most grim of the characters."

Art: Dan Parlin/John Dixon

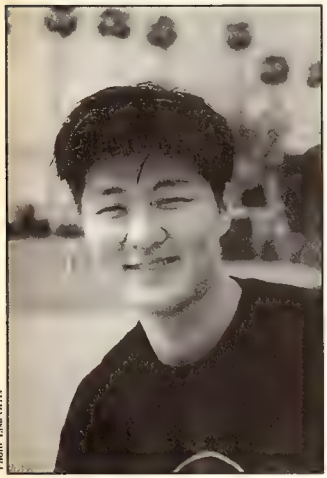
**Bloodshot's "put in situations where he's not likely to be able to let everyone walk away," even if he's uncomfortable with it.**

"Bloodshot will be coming back to *Eternal Warrior* in the storyline I'm working on now with Mark Moretti on that book. In one of my early issues, when I first started working for Valiant, I did a story called 'Evil Reincarnate,' which dealt with a character we called the immortal enemy, a man who would die and be reincarnated as someone else. Just a pure evil character, and Gilad would hunt him down and kill him. This has gone on for thousands of years. In the latest storyline, this character has risen again. At various times through history, he hasn't always just died and been reborn. He was able to, at the moment of death, by sheer force of will, force his consciousness out of his body and into someone nearby that he had physical contact with. And he gets inside Gilad. And becomes the Eternal Enemy. It's a pretty exciting storyline, and we had to bring someone else in that would be strong enough to help defeat him. That's where Bloodshot comes in."

VanHook also writes Valiant's *Solar, Man of the Atom* and (with Moretti) *Eternal Warrior* books. "Solar is much more of a philosopher and much more somber about things [than Bloodshot is]; he has the weight of five billion lives on his conscience. The Eternal Warrior is probably the most grim of the characters. He has walked the Earth for more than 5,000 years, and seen a lot of death. There's a contrast between these three characters. Bloodshot has a sense of humor, probably a better sense of humor than the other two. He's willing to take chances that the others, at least Solar, might not, in certain ways, with his life. Not necessarily physical chances, but life choices and things.

"Bloodshot's going to try to start living life to the fullest in many ways," Kevin VanHook explains. "He's going to try to explore romance. His entire memories of his former life were completely taken from him, and he only had little snippets and flashes of what it was like. So now, a new relationship or anything like that, it's all new, unexplored territory. He's really out to see what he can get out of life."

**"There's nothing wrong with doing superhero comics," smiles Lee. "They'll keep me young."**



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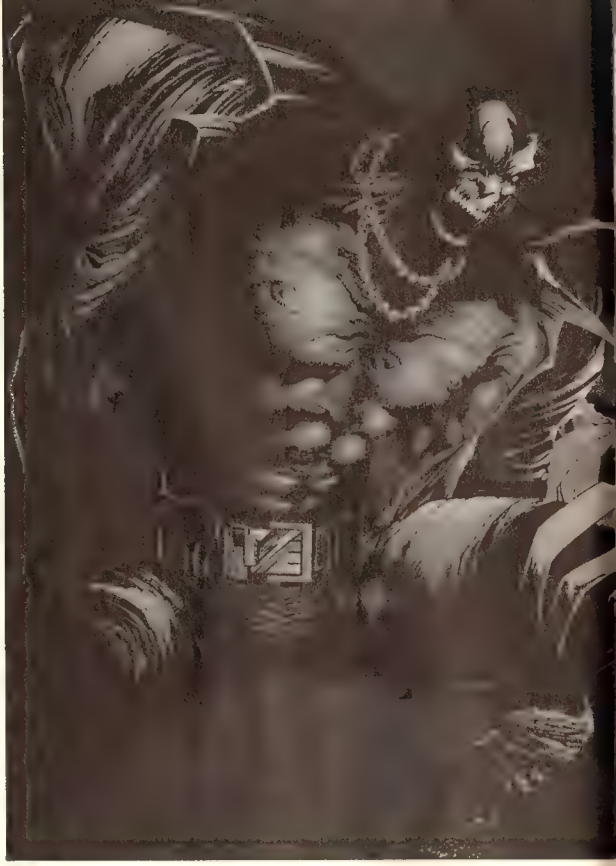


# Dark &

## *That's exactly how Jae Lee describes*

Jae Lee doesn't look like your typical comic book artist. The eager 20-year-old in the Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt seems like he would be more comfortable at a U2 concert than behind a drawing board. Nonetheless, he's one of the hottest illustrators in the field today.

Lee (no relation to Jim or Stan) hails from the Washington, D.C. area ("A nice place to grow up, but not that nice when you're young and single!"), and first shot to prominence drawing *Namor, the Sub-Mariner*. His take on Marvel's first mutant was different and refreshing.

The witty and soft-spoken artist found that his year with *Namor* taught him a great deal. "I didn't learn anything consciously, I learned from on-the-job experience. Working under such a tight deadline on a monthly book was probably the best thing for me. I learned how to draw under pressure, which comes in handy," he laughs.

"It has become much easier. I remember when I first started, it took a week to do a page. I would break out the page in panels, take a sheet of paper, draw the panel, then trace onto the Bristol [board], re-draw it and overwork it to death so much that it looked very stiff. Now I draw straight on the board, it comes much easier to me and I'm much happier with the stuff I'm doing."

Youngblood Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Rob Liefeld

Already out, Jae Lee's Chapel storyline begins the *Youngblood: Strikefile*.

# Violent *his comics style.*

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

As an artist, he has a goal. "The three books I would like to draw are *Superman* and *Batman* and *Captain America*," he states. "Everybody knows who Superman is; he's the most popular name in cult fiction, there's so much history to that character. That goes for Batman and Captain America as well. They would be really interesting to do. If I drew Superman, I could tell a person on the street and they would say, 'Wow!' but if I say *Namor*, they would say, 'What's that?' "

Lee's comics career began when "I had just dropped out of commercial art school. I went to New York with a portfolio, saw some editors and they didn't like my stuff. Then, I met a writer named Scott Lobdell [CS #35], who writes *Uncanny X-Men* now. He took my samples around for me, things happened and I got a job."

His childhood art hero was John Byrne. "The first comic I purchased was a Byrne book; I used to imitate his style and draw just like him," the artist grins. "But when I started drawing professionally, I lost that influence."

Ironically, he went from admiring Byrne to working with him. "When they asked me to do *Namor*, at the time they also offered me several other projects, including *Silver Sable* and *Deathlok*, but I decided to go with *Namor* instead, because John Byrne was working on the book. I also liked the editor, Terry Kavanaugh.

"Working with John was interesting," Lee admits. "My first issue took me three months to draw, because I wanted to make a good first impression—I was following John Byrne and," Lee smiles, "John would actually look at these pages! After a while, I started to get into my own groove and develop my own style, and totally went off on it."

Lee took a subversive approach to the Sub-Mariner. "I have never seen a [*Namor* creator] Bill Everett Namor, so I really wasn't paying too much attention to that. The Byrne stuff I was trying to get away from, because when I was 13 years old, I used to do a dead ringer for Byrne, and I wanted to get away from it.

"For my first issue of *Namor*, I did a very geometric, angular, stylized version of Namor, and then when I started inking my own work, that's when I found my current style, which is more like Simon Bisley and Bill Sienkiewicz. I totally beefed up Namor. I think Byrne liked what I was doing," Lee

smiles. "I don't think he'd be as happy if I just did a rip-off of his stuff."

He enjoyed altering "Marvel's first and mightiest mutant." "Oh yeah. It was great to take that character and change him. That's why I want to do Batman, Captain America and Superman—I would like to make them dark. Batman, who should be a dark character, isn't portrayed that way. I would give him stubble and a cigarette," Lee jokes. "We would get letters from pissed-off mothers everywhere!"

**Lee's style contributed to the change in Namor's look. "It was great to take that character and change him," he notes.**

There's a cinematic look to Lee's artwork, as seen in his *film noir*-ish *Namor*. "I love movies; I watch a lot of them, perhaps too many," he laughs. "As far as my artwork goes, I like to take a cinematic approach. If it wasn't for comics, I would probably go to film school."

The artist worked with another group of mutants, but didn't enjoy the experience. "I did *X-Factor*, but I wasn't happy with my work. I had to turn the stuff out too fast. I was also doing *Namor*, and since we didn't have any fill-in issues, I was doing both at the same time."

**A *WildC.A.T.s* mini-series follows his *Youngblood* work. Lee's own book appears later this year.**

Lee takes inspiration from the greats. "Right now, I would have to say my major influences are Simon Bisley, Dave McKean, Mike Mignola, H.R. Giger, Bill Sienkiewicz and Patrick Nagel," he states.

He recently got to team with one of them. "I worked with Bill but unfortunately, on the *Namor* we did, the deadline was so tight I wasn't able to do my best work. I'm sure Bill also had to do it fast. I wish in the future we could work on something together that we could take our time with."

Lee marvels at the power of comics. "What astounds me is how many people read these books. The fact that it goes outside of the United States—we get letters from Germany, England, Australia—that's from *Namor* alone!"

Ironically, though the young artist gets international acclaim for his artwork, the one place he doesn't get such attention is at home. "My parents think I *should* be in school," he shrugs. "I don't think they appreciate it. They grew up in Korea, where there was no such thing as comics. My older brother Sang studies business and he's not a comics fan. He thinks what I'm doing is very childish," Lee says sadly.

Comics have always been important to Lee. "I was born in South Korea in 1972. I came here when I was five years old, and I picked up my first comics when I was 11—*Alpha Flight* #13 and *Secret Wars* #1," he admits. "With all those Marvel superheroes on the cover, I just had to buy it. I was a fan of Marvel and DC. When I collected comics, I never read any particular title, but if it had good art, I would pick it up."

The artist recently joined Image Comics. "Yes," he says proudly. "I'm working on three issues of *Youngblood: Strikefile* with Rob Liefeld, a three-issue *WildC.A.T.S* mini-series and my own book, which will be out in December." As for the book's title and other details, Lee remains mum. "I have the concept for it, and it'll be very interesting!"

He feels the biggest break in his career "was the day Image called. I thought I would be doing 'the standard Marvel Comic' for years, and then Image called and gave me a bunch of great ideas. They're just an energetic bunch of people to work with. Most of the stuff I'm doing now is for them."

Image appealed to him because "I enjoy looking at good artwork, and there doesn't seem to be a whole lot of that around. The Image books I like a lot—I also like Tundra and Fleetway. As far as Marvel and DC go, there's not much."

Lee has also bid farewell to the avenging son of Atlantis. "I left *Namor* because I had been doing the book for about a year, and I didn't have any problems except that the deadlines were getting closer and closer, and I found myself rushing and wasn't happy with the work I was putting out in the later issues," he explains. "I needed a change of pace, and the Image offer came along. It seemed like the perfect opportunity, so I took it."

Namor Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Marvel Comics Entertainment Group

**Lee is enthusiastic about the Image gang: "They're just an energetic bunch of people to work with."**

**His *film noir*-ish approach to comics reflects Lee's interest in movies.**

As an artist, he jokes that "I want to be known for staying out of jail! Seriously, I want to be *respected*. I know Todd McFarlane is fond of saying that, but it's true. If you're young and come up with any kind of success, some of the older artists out there don't treat you like an artist. They still treat you like an *amateur*.

"To them, you will always be an up-and-comer. There's nothing wrong with that, but I feel people should be treated based on what they can do, not their age or how long they've been in the business." With some older artists, Lee feels "that there's nothing that binds us together except for the fact that we work on comics!"

He's surprised by his current popularity. "It hasn't sunk in yet," Lee laughs. "When I first started, I did a convention appearance, and I had no idea what kind of market there was for

All WildC.A.T.s Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Jim Lee/Courtesy Homage Studios

this stuff or what fans were like. When you used to buy comics, you read them and that was it. You didn't go out and buy 50,000 copies.

"I remember sitting at the signing table, doing sketches and they weren't free. A seven-year-old kid came up and said, 'Could you do me a sketch for free?' " he laughingly recalls. "I did, and he took the sketch and said, 'Now I can take it to school and sell it!' It's like, you can't trust *anybody*!"

Lee is about to do a stint on Marvel's favorite web-slinger. "I'm doing *Spider-Man*, issues #40-#42. I like to draw people with facial expressions, and with Spider-Man, you can't rely on that," Lee notes. "You have to rely totally on body posture. I think Todd McFarlane did an excellent job with that, which is why it's gonna be so hard to follow him on it.

"I'll probably do it with Spider-Man's hands and body language. I haven't really worked on any superhero comics, because Namor isn't your typical superhero. The way I draw is dark, with no costumes really. The closest I came would be *X-Factor*, which had some superheroes running around."

**"I enjoy looking at good artwork," Lee explains as to why he likes Image.**

**"As far as my artwork goes, I like to take a cinematic approach," Lee says.**

His Spidey story will be something of a "Marvel Team-Up," reviving a blast from the past. "It co-stars Iron Fist," Lee explains. "We re-introduce him to the general audience, and that will lead into a new *Iron Fist* series. I'll be doing the first six issues.

"Marvel has hopes for it to become 'the next *Ghost Rider*.' It'll be written by Marc De Matteis. Marc's fantastic. When the *Iron Fist* project came about, the editor asked me if I was interested in drawing it—I said, 'Yes.' We sat around talking about writers and the first one who came to mind was Marc De Matteis. I called him up and asked him, and he said, 'Yes!' "

Ironically, Lee didn't care for Iron Fist. "Not really," he concedes. "I always thought he was goofy-looking, with the yellow slippers and all that. No offense to anybody, but the '70s were an awkward time. I like taking crappy characters like that and pumping something into them, and hopefully making them popular. The challenge is there."

The original *Iron Fist* introduced one of Marvel's most popular villains, the murderous manbeast Sabretooth. "Sabretooth will definitely come back for a guest appearance," Lee predicts. "As far as the other villains go, I never read *Iron Fist*, so I don't know who the other villains are," he laughs. "I'm sure they were all 1970s kung-fu rejects!"

He's enjoying his current assignment. "*Youngblood* epitomizes the superhero genre. The issue that I'm doing spotlights Chapel. He carries big guns around and shoots people. It's very violent and dark, which seems to be my trademark, in a way—'dark and violent.' There's nothing wrong with doing superhero comics. I think they're great. They'll keep me young," he jokes.

Does he have plans after Image? "Right now, I'm just trying to think of one thing at a time," he shrugs. "After I'm done with *WildC.A.T.S* and *Youngblood*, I'll start working on my own book. After that, who knows?"

The artist feels he has come full circle. "My first book was *Marvel Comics Presents* #85—it was an eight-part Beast serial. It's kind of funny how things turned out. Rob Liefeld had done the first two chapters, and I had to do the last six. Now, we're working together!"

# POSTCARDS WITH AN EDGE

## *Dark Horse welcomes you to "Comics' Greatest World."*

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

The superhero universe is about to expand to four new cities—the sites of *Comics' Greatest World*. But unlike most comics, the settings of Dark Horse Comics' new line are just as important as its stars.

"If all you're concerned about is having guys in skin-tight suits knocking things over, I guess *anything* will do," says editor/designer Chris Warner. "But if you want something with a little more meat to it, that sense of place is very important to a storyteller."

Warner had the formidable task of designing all of the characters and their various environments for the 16-issue limited series, which introduces a new hero or group of heroes in each issue. There are four books set in each of the four areas of Dark Horse's superhero world. X, Pit Bulls, Ghost and Monster live in the corrupt community of Arcadia. The Utopian Golden City is the home of Rebel, Mecha, Titan and Catalyst. In the heart of the Rust Belt, Barb Wire, the Machine, Wolf Gang and Motorhead operate in Steel Harbor, while the mysterious Vortex of the southwestern U.S. features Division 13, Hero Zero, King Tiger and Vortex.

Basing his creations on the cities, Warner used an architectural approach while fashioning the Dark Horse superhero universe. "Our concept of these different environments was developed early on, each with a different flavor and design sense, and specific thematic underpinnings," says Warner. "Once that started happening, it became much easier to develop characters, because the stage was set."

Creative director Randy Stradley explains that the scenes were set through their environment. "We said, 'Well, here's the city of Arcadia, here's its personality and environment. What kind of heroes would *logically* exist in this environment? What agendas would they have?' Once we determined that, the characters took over, and we decided what drives each one. It's a different way than I ever thought of working, but it turned out real well. Each of the characters has an agenda. Each has something in their character which motivates them; it gives them something to do beyond just stopping crime. I don't even think we have any characters who've dedicated their lives to stopping super-villains or fighting crime!"

"We came up with characters that fit the environment and themes to build characters from the inside out, rather than tossing out a costume, a name and a power," Warner agrees. "It grows more organically, rather than being constructed. I put *Steel Harbor* together as 'Metal City,' a Rust Belt post-industrial nightmare with characters like Motorhead, Wolf Gang and Barb Wire. I wanted them in a place with a certain look and feel to it. It occurred to me that the character called X would work best in a different type of environment, more art deco and skyscrapers, and we came up with the idea for a city built by superheroes. All the different environments represent certain facets of American culture, history and ascendance."

Coming from the hope that Golden C[illegible] provides, Catalyst teams the city's heroes as *Agents of Change*.

Art: George Perez

FIRST CLASS MAIL

The four settings—Arcadia, Golden City, Steel Harbor and the Vortex—had a very important influence on the titles. "I've always found it uninteresting when characters are set in the same milieu, and it's always a place that exists [in the real world]," says Warner. "That limits you tremendously. When you must deal with the realities of New York or Los Angeles, you can only push things so far. It's much easier and more interesting to build a place from the ground up. It allows you to push the metaphor much farther in every way. Too often in superhero books, the stage on which they operate is secondary, and doesn't serve much of a function other than furnishing buildings to destroy. Every area here has a different character, look and function, and a sense of place that strengthens the story and themes."

"Arcadia represents America in the '30s and '40s, with gangsters, hoods, underground crime and political corruption," says Dark Horse managing editor Barbara Kesel. "Golden City is America in the '50s and '60s—technology will fix everything, the world is golden. Steel Harbor is like the down-and-dirty '80s, where everything is techno-corrupt, and we can't even trust our senses because man and machine are becoming inextricably intertwined. The Vortex is the future—it's the unknown. Anything weird and strange can happen there. There's a thematic tie to the characters and the stories within each environment that echoes each piece of America."

The format of Dark Horse's superhero line is distinctive: 16 issues introducing 16 groups or characters, 16-page stories released over 16 weeks at the bargain price of $1 each. According to Warner, part of the strategy was to make their books stand out on shelves during a summer when comics shops will be flooded with more titles than ever before.

"Originally, we planned to start releasing some monthly books in the summer," he explains. "We began developing these books in the spring [of 1992]; since there would be so much material out there this summer, we felt it was going to be hard to get people to pay attention to what we were doing if we released several monthly books. We're not interested in diving into the speculation pool and making people buy a $2 comic book for $4 because it has a status on the cover."

Kesel says she's most excited about the ambiguity and the unlimited possibilities of each character. "I've heard that at Marvel, Venom had to become a hero to have his own book, because villains *can't* have books. Things have to be black or white, hero or villain," she says. "We don't have to be. It's like the real world—some people love you,

## Visit Arcadia

Arcadia is an East Coast city near New York controlled by corrupt politicians and organized crime run by a dark cabal of robber barons, reminiscent of cities in the '20s and '30s where government, crime and business worked closely together. "That happens today in certain places, at certain levels, but the main reason for doing this was *not* to point a finger and say, 'This is just like that place.' The interesting thing was the concept that within an environment like that, where corruption is institutionalized, the truly heroic people are the people who are often vilified, like whistle-blowers in large companies," says Chris Warner.

"In Arcadia, the heroes are regarded as villains, pursued by the police. The motives for most of these people on either side are in question, and that's something we're trying to do throughout this line. Rather than constantly define the characters for the readers every issue, we're looking to reflect reality. Learning peoples' motives is a long process—people aren't always sure of their own motives."

The hunt for X runs throughout the four issues spotlighting the city of Arcadia. "It's a citywide dragnet on every level," says Warner. "The police, the criminals and everyone are trying to find this guy; in the lead-in stories in *Dark Horse Presents*, there's an election going on and he's killing the candidates. Part of his *modus operandi* is that he publicly announces who he's going to take out before he does so, and he manages to get to them anyway—part of his point is that there's *no* protection from X."

*X* features art by Warner and Tim Bradstreet, with a Frank Miller cover. "X is a very dark, violent character who's a law unto himself," Warner notes. "His motives are not clear, other than the fact that he's killing people that he doesn't care for within this environment. He's a very dangerous, but calculating character, interesting on many levels—we don't really want to be hanging out with him and we don't elevate him to heroic stature.

"He's not easy to peg, which is what we're trying to do with all of these characters. We're trying to keep an *edge* on all of them. Too often today, the characters are just a costume, a name and a set of powers—that's about as deep as many of these characters get. We don't have characters without unique elements. For me, the powers and name come from the personality or motivation of the character."

*Pit Bulls* is drawn by Joe Phillips and John Dell, with a cover by Bob McLeod. "We're not doing 16 origin books here, so this group of four characters is already functioning as the story begins," explains Warner, who developed the title. "They're a group of young people who've been raised as orphans to be fighting machines or assassins. Unlike dogs, which can be raised to become attack dogs, people are a little more volatile, so these four have broken away and are hiding out in Arcadia. They're terrific fighters, but they really don't know how to do anything else. They've been specifically trained *not* to be a part of society, to be completely dependent on the people who trained them. They've broken away from that now, and they're almost like little kids. They've been brutally abused to turn them into these things, so they're competent in *one* area, and screwed-up in others."

*Monster* is pencilled by newcomer Derek Thompson, with inks by Ande Parks. "*Monster* is a pretty self-evident character," Warner explains. "It lives in the sewers of Arcadia, a huge, hulking, incommunicative monstrosity—but, there's someone trapped in there who would like to get out. It's a very tormented character who would just like to be left alone, but wants to make contact at the same time, because it's very alone. It's a horrific, powerful being who, because of the situation, is not necessarily very rational. In some ways, it's pathetic, but definitely the most powerful personality in the Arcadia line-up. Which is something else we like to do with our characters—the more powerful they are, the more screwed-up they are. There's nothing more sickening than somebody who's really talented and powerful, and also a good person!"

*Ghost*, with art by Adam Hughes and Mark Farmer, sports a Dave Dorman cover. "Ghost has the flavor of a supernatural pulp character," says Warner, "a ghostlike being that can go through walls and become corporeal for short periods of time. Ghost is the vengeful character of our line—we're trying to stay away from characters motivated solely by revenge, because that tends to be the first option of most character creations!"

Jerry Prosser provides the stories within Arcadia.

—*Kim Howard Johnson*

PRESORTED FIRST CLASS
AIR PRINTED MATTER

Art: Rob McLeod

Four orphans raised to be assassins break away from their trainers, but are at a loss to fit into society. They are Arcadia's Pit Bulls.

Art: Frank Miller

"X is a very dark, violent character who's a law unto himself," explains Chris Warner.

Art: Dave Dorman

Ghost "has the flavor of a 1940s supernatural pulp character," says Warner.

Art: Doug Mahnke

"It's a horrific, powerful being who, because of the situation, is not necessarily very rational," Warner says of Monster.

some people hate you, and we're going to try to show all sides of these characters. We're going to try to present fully-realized characters, without the expectation that they must be good role models or bad moral lessons."

One long backstory extends throughout all four environments and all 16 comics. "Each individual city story is separate, and the Arcadia story, which is essentially the search for X, is led into by three *Dark Horse Presents* stories," says Warner. "The backstory involves these characters called the Seekers, who appear in all of the issues. They're looking for someone in particular, and they've been drawn to this world because of the fantastic characters who've started appearing here. The Seekers are apparently looking for someone they don't like much. They don't know what he looks like or where he'll be, and they're going from city to city during these events, investigating these supercharacters. In some stories, they're just observers; in others, they become directly involved. They begin compiling their data in the Vortex books."

"Arcadia is the first place the Seekers show up," explains Stradley. "They learn enough there to make them curious. Golden City, which has so many non-human, ultra-powerful characters, sets off all their alarms, and they pick up more information there. In Steel Harbor, they come across further information that gives them a triangulation on the enemy's location, which leads them to Cinnabar Flats in Vortex."

PRESORTED THIRD CLASS MAIL

Even though *Comics' Greatest World* isn't Dark Horse's first attempt at superhero comics, it is by far their most ambitious. "In the mid-80s, we did some superhero stuff, and it was very difficult at that time to compete head-to-head against the large companies," explains Warner. "At that time, we realized we needed to establish ourselves as a full-line publisher, and build our credibility slowly over time with retailers. Then, when we really wanted to compete in that genre, it wouldn't be our whole publishing line—which is not our plan anyway.

"At some point, 20 percent of our line is going to be mainstream, company-owned superhero stuff. Unlike other companies which have come to prominence in the last few years, we're more interested in getting new readers than having speculators buying 100 copies of every book that we do. We don't feel that's a strategy that's going to last. Certainly, people buy a few extra copies of some Dark Horse books, but we've established a long-term readership with creator-owned properties and licensed books, and we're going for that with superhero books. We're not interested in getting into this idiotic speculation bloodbath, and

## Tour Golden City

It is a Utopian community, with no crime, poverty or pollution. "Golden City deals with hope. Everything is as wonderful as can be made so mechanically," says Barbara Kesel. "It's as though every lovely blue-sky social program in the '60s and '70s went into effect without *any* budget problems."

This community has been transformed by the ultra-powerful Grace, a young woman closer to a mayor than a superman, more of a political figure than a superhero. "Grace is calling together the world's highest-powered heroes. She lives in a citadel on the cliffs overlooking the city, and everybody knows she lives there—it's like living near the Pope," says Kesel, explaining that there's one menace linking the four-part Golden City tale. "A big badass villain named Warmaker comes to town. He's a former soldier covered with organic armor, out of which he can form weapons. The mystery of the whole story is, is this happening on its own or did Grace engineer it?"

The Seekers have a smaller role here, showing up to check things out and test the beings at hand.

Art: Jerry Ordway

**The golden boy of Golden City is Rebel, an energy-based hero whose alter-ego has a strange secret.**

*Rebel* is scripted by Kesel, pencilled by Tim Hamilton and inked by Gary Martin. Jerry Ordway did the cover. Rebel is the teenaged heartthrob of Golden City; he radiates and absorbs energy, and can short out energy-based systems. His human persona also involves a strange secret. The first issue of *Rebel* sees Warmaker jailed in a new super-prison located under Grace's citadel, since everyone knows that Golden City is the safest place to detain the world's most powerful people. Unfortunately, he escapes and Rebel must battle to contain him.

*Mecha* is written by Kesel, with art by Chuck Wojtkiewicz and John Lowe. The super-powerful Mecha has just come to Golden City, wanting to live where the rest of the cool superheroes are. He wears lightweight armor, based on a mysterious alien technology, which can change form and create weapons. Unfortunately, he's forced to tangle with Warmaker, in a story that picks up following the battle with Rebel, and the man inside the Mecha armor must figure out how to operate it while fighting for his life.

Art: Dave Johnson

**Lightweight alien armor houses Mecha, who came to Golden City to be with the cool superheroes.**

**He may be this Utopia's most well-established hero, but Titan has problems playing with the other kids.**

Art: Walt Simonson

*Titan*, scripted by Kesel, is drawn by Brian Apthorp and Jimmy Palmiotti, with a cover by Walt Simonson. Titan has classic super-powers like strength and endurance, but he also has an attitude problem. Titan has trouble playing well with others in the Golden City because he's brash and competitive, though he's one of the community's oldest established heroes, and has to take on Warmaker. Madison, Grace's only weakness, is introduced in this issue.

*Catalyst: Agents of Change* features a George Perez cover, with Jan Duursema, Damon Willis and Rick Magyar illustrating Kesel's story. "All of the characters in Golden City collapse into *Catalyst*," says Kesel. Grace assembles and leads a team of heroes that includes Titan, Mecha, Rebel, Madison and newcomers Ruby (an armored hero) and the healer known as Rhapsody in the final battle against Warmaker.

*—Kim Howard Johnson*

frankly, I think it *won't* last. People are getting really tired of it. Sure, once in a while we've done a special thing on the cover, or a platinum edition, which is fun to a certain extent, but to try to push millions of sales on that kind of thing is detrimental to readership.

"We're trying to bring the same flavor to superhero books that we've brought to our other books. Our goal is not to do books like Marvel and take their audience away. We're going to do things the way we've always done things, and in the long run, we think the readers will appreciate that."

FIRST CLASS MAIL

With Malibu's *Ultraverse*, Razorline's *Barkerverse*, Continuity's *Deathwatch 2000*, the Image/Valiant crossover, the emergence of Milestone and Vertigo, and over 100 monthly Marvel titles being released this year, publishers will be scrambling for every inch of shelf space in comics shops this summer. Kesel says that despite the glut of comics, it may be a very good time to launch *Comics' Greatest World*.

"There's a glut nearly any time," she observes. "It's almost good timing, in that so many people are tuned into it. You're not being passed over because they're going, 'Oh, there are so many, there's this one and this one and this one and this one.' Everybody knows the names of all the players, because none of them are alone. That's kind of a plus. And, I think the dollar price is a plus. The whole summer serves as a series of intros—almost like appetizers. We know what series we intend to start off with after this, but who knows? Depending on response, we may change plans!"

Warner agrees that the quality of the Dark Horse line—along with the price and reliable ship dates—will make the difference. "People have accused anyone who's bringing out anything new this summer of jumping on the bandwagon," says Warner. "Frankly, we were aware of the conditions this summer a year ago, and we've been surprised to find that it's worse than *anyone* ever imagined. Anybody who thought they would put something out this summer to jump on the bandwagon is out of their mind, because this summer's gonna be a bloodbath.

"We always intended to do superhero books, and we figured that there's so much attention on them right now, this was a good time to get in on the ballgame and show that we're as capable of doing things in this genre as well as we've done other genres. Our books are readable, quality, well-drawn projects, and we did this in response to what people were complaining about—comics are too expensive, so ours are one dollar. They've complained that there's virtually no story to some of them, and that's totally antithetical to

## See Steel Harbor

Steel Harbor is a Rust Belt, post-industrial nightmare that explodes with super-powered gang warfare. Twenty or 30 years ago, it was the envy of the world, a manufacturing giant that has decayed into a crumbling, rusted-out hellhole.

"The city government can't control the chaos," explains Chris Warner. "What they can't fix, they don't even bother with. It's a statement on what has happened to the inner cities in this country—the problems have grown so great that people have just thrown up their hands."

As the cities begin to crumble, large portions of Steel Harbor have been taken over by gangs led by super-villains. The gang warfare is on an apocalyptic scale, which comes to a head in the four comics set in Steel Harbor: *Barb Wire*, *The Machine*, *Wolf Gang* and *Motorhead*. "Several of the super-gangs have banded together, rather than fight each other. One of those isn't as malevolent or aggressive as the others, so on the night that the four issues take place, the other gangs are trying to take out Wolf Gang," says Warner.

The events of the Steel Harbor books center around that attempt, a night when the town is in flames and

Art Mike Mignola

**The Machine, a cyberpunk character, works with Barb Wire to find a method to the madness that is Steel Harbor.**

Art: Dave Dorman. All characters & ™ & Trademark & Copyright 1993 Dark Horse Comics, Inc.

**In the post-industrial nightmare of Steel Harbor, the officials turn to others, like Barb Wire, to control the chaos.**

the battle builds. The issues form a self-contained tale, although there's story element that weaves through all 16 issues, and sets up the first issue of Dark Horse's new monthly titles.

*Barb Wire* is written by Chris Warner, pencilled by Paul Gulacy and inked by Dan Davis. "She's a high profile skip tracer or bounty hunter type of character," Warner explains.

Within this environment, the city officials have lost control, so they're basically endorsing *anybody* who'll help keep the carnage to a minimum. At the beginning, Barb Wire is after a superpowered gang leader called Ignition. Along with the Machine, an operative currently working as an intelligence agent for her, she finds out that ongoing riots aren't just uncontrolled rage set off by an event that happens in the Golden City books. There is a very directed situation."

*The Machine* is written by Warner, with art by James (*The Crow*) O'Barr. Picking up after the events in *Barb Wire*, The Machine works with the bounty hunter to uncover what's causing the seemingly random rioting.

"He's a very powerful character, a cyberpunk character who can push his consciousness through phone lines, computer networks and satellites," says Warner. "The Machine is like the character in the Japanese film *Tetsuo*, a cybernetic Tetsuo-type."

*Wolf Gang*, written and drawn by Warner, is at the center of the events in Steel Harbor. "They're probably the most powerful single unit," he says. "They tend to be less criminally oriented. Even though they're a hardassed unit and protect their turf swiftly and surely, as the other gangs started to knock each other off and become more powerful, the city has put their muscle behind Wolf Gang, because it's the one group strong enough to keep everything from blowing up."

*Motorhead*, written by Warner with art by Vince Giarrano, spotlights one of the most powerful characters of all. "Motorhead is a character introduced early as a backstory within the Steel Harbor story," says Warner. "He's a very volatile, powerful, tormented character that explodes with this issue, and throws gas on the fire for the final confrontation."

*—Kim Howard Johnson*

what we've always done. They've complained about comics shipping late, so we guarantee that if our books don't ship the week we say they will, they're 100 percent returnable, and *nobody* has done that before. People have complained that we've overprinted on some of our books, hurting their collectibility. We don't really care about what our books are worth in 10 years, but because we listened, we're just going to print to order on these books, so when they're sold out, they're gone! We're showing commitment, not jumping on a bandwagon. We're responding to the market."

THIRD CLASS MAIL

Four titles have been tapped for ongoing monthly status once the 16-issue mini-series ends. The first issue of *Vortex* will be released shortly after the introductory saga's conclusion, followed by *X*, *Barb Wire* and *Catalyst*, one regular series from each of the four environments. As the monthly line expands, Dark Horse will add a new title to each of the cities, so that next year, the line will include two titles from each environment, and three each the next year, along with occasional mini-series and one-shots.

"Our approach is different," Warner announces. "Rather than try to stitch together a tapestry of a million books, with unwieldy continuity, perfunctory crossovers and four books featuring the same character, we prefer that these environments have very tight continuity. Like any city, the events going on there affect people. That also gives us the opportunity to flesh out the secondary characters within those environments, and have those characters functioning within several books at the same time as integral parts of the environment."

Randy Stradley says that ultimately, *Comics' Greatest World* will succeed due to the art and stories, and notes the Dark Horse limited series includes stories within stories.

"The Seekers backstory ties everything together," he says. "Within that, we have four separate stories that take place in each location, and within each issue, there are even more specific, smaller character-oriented stories. Coming up with good stories has been the thing that has driven us, and I think that's our greatest strength at this point. We've had some great creators working on these books, so we'll have good art and good stories. I guess that's our gimmick!"

AIR PRINTED MATTER

If Dark Horse has taken longer to begin a superhero line, it isn't due to a lack of enthusiasm; Barbara Kesel admits she can't wait. "I dearly love superheroes," she says. "I love the mythic quality of them, and I'm getting a chance to do my Wonder Woman/Superman /great mythic character. I'm really jazzed!"

## Inside The Vortex

Unlike the other three titles, the final four comics take place in a region of the Southwest, rather than in the confines of one particular city. Hoyo Grande is a would-be Las Vegas, home to has-been gangsters, washed-up lounge singers and fanatical mystics who plan to destroy mankind. Only a few miles away is the small bedroom community of Cinnabar, near the Cinnabar Flats U.S. Army Research Center—secret entrance to the vast underground complex built by aliens and known as The Vortex.

The Vortex is the culmination of all that has gone before, including the mystery of the Seekers. "They've been going from location to location to determine whether the superheroes that populate this world have anything to do with their enemy's presence on this world," explains Randy Stradley. "They've come to Cinnabar Flats U.S. Army Research Center, but the heroes in the area only have contact with the Seekers in the final book.

"All of these books are designed to introduce and put different characters through their paces. King Tiger and Hero Zero never meet, but Hero Zero is involved in the kind of adventure that would logically involve him, and at the point where he breaks off his story, it is turned into more of a *King Tiger* type of problem."

*Division 13* is written by Stradley, with art by Doug Mahnke. "Within the Cinnabar Flats military base is Block 13, which is a cell block containing human beings affected by an alien virus or by close contact with the Vortex—an interdimensional nexus created nearly 50 years ago," explains Stradley. "Some of them are superpowered, and some are just deformed, virtually kept as prisoners and used for government research."

Art: Frank Miller

**"Vortex is an alien scientist trying to combat a federation of alien civilizations," says Randy Stradley. "They're wiping out all life wherever they find it."**

Division 13 is made up of four escapees from Block 13, whose mission to free prisoners from Block 13 is interrupted by the Seekers' arrival. "The group's leader is Frank Lamb, who apparently has no super-powers, but does have abilities that will be played out in the future," says Stradley. "Wrath is a huge, hulking blue guy with a wicked-looking axe, which he picked up on a brief, horrifying trip into The Vortex. Flux is a shape-shifter who can alter her appearance while maintaining a basically human form. And the final character is Betty, who's never seen. She's the intelligence-gathering member of the group who always seems to know what's happening."

*Hero Zero* is written by Stradley and pencilled and inked by Eric Shanower. "*Hero Zero* is Ant-Man, he's Giant-Man, he's two heroes in one!" exclaims Stradley. "He's a size-changing superhero who goes from really small to really big."

When the Seekers reach the Vortex in *Division 13*, they unintentionally release a menace that threatens Hero Zero. Although Hero Zero doesn't exactly defeat the creature, he manages to save himself and his loved ones, and the deadly threat goes after King Tiger.

*King Tiger* is written by Stradley, pencilled by Paul Chadwick and inked by Jimmy Palmiotti. "King Tiger is a Tibetan mystic, with various magical powers, residing in Hoyo Grande," Stradley explains. "He doesn't project beams out of an amulet or just shoot bolts through his hands—he's a physical hero. He writes magical spells on the blade of his sword with his own blood, and uses it to slice demons!"

The mystical superhero of the Dark Horse line deals with the menace after the events in *Hero Zero*, while the events in *King Tiger* lead to the final confrontation in *Vortex*.

*Vortex* is written by Stradley, with art by Bob McLeod and a cover by Frank Miller. "Vortex is a supremely powerful character—the nearest equivalent would probably be having God or the Devil here on Earth, and depending on who you talk to, he's one or the other," says Stradley. "He doesn't care what you call him, because he has his own agenda to worry about, and the concerns of mankind are almost beneath his notice. It plays out on a bigger canvas than *X* or some of the other characters.

"He's an alien scientist who is trying to combat a federation of alien civilizations, who are on a religious crusade to make sure no one else in the universe has their technology. They're wiping out all life wherever they find it. The confrontation here with the Seekers sets the stage for the events in *Vortex* #1, the first ongoing monthly issue. The Seekers will be around for a time; they're just the advance guard of a larger threat!"

—*Kim Howard Johnson*

**Frank Lamb, Wrath, Flux and the unseen Betty make up Division 13, a group of Block 13 escapees who now try to free the rest of the block.**

Art: Doug Mahnke
Layout & Design: Jim McLernon

## *Somewhere in Arizona, they began building Malibu's comics universe from scratch.*

By MICHAEL BERRY

The origins of our own universe are shrouded in mystery. When and how did it begin? What immutable rules govern it? Thinkers as profound as Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking have pondered the many unanswered questions at the center of our cosmic destiny.

Only slightly less obscure are the origins of the *Ultraverse*, the concept unifying a series of new superhero titles from Malibu Comics. While there's no doubt that the *Ultraverse* sprang into being at a hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona, that its principal architects include such seasoned comics pros as Mike Barr, Norm Breyfogle, Steve Englehart, Gerard Jones and Len Strazewski and that its first effects on the comics industry will be felt this summer, the full ramifications of the project remain hidden from the vast majority of humankind.

Malibu Editor-in-Chief Chris Ulm prefers to keep it that way for the time being. He and the various contributors to the new line of books are willing to discuss the general *Ultraverse* outlines, but they refuse to divulge some key details about how it differs from what we've come to accept as everyday, plain-vanilla reality.

OK, let them play a few cards close to the vest now. Ulm and crew, however, can't duck the big question facing a newer company contemplating the institution of a complex continuity: Why do comics readers need yet *another* universe to keep track of?

"We started off with the premise of doing great characters and great comics," says Ulm. "The fact that they're all linked together only makes it better. The better question to ask is, why do we need more high-quality comics? I think the answer to that is self-evident."

The fictional worlds in which the characters at Marvel and DC work, play and fight were patched together after years, even decades, of willy-nilly, seat-of-their-pants storytelling. By comparison, the characters and situations in the Malibu *Ultraverse*

All Ultraverse Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Malibu Comics Entertainment Inc.

# Origins of the ULTRAVERSE

Layout & Design: Calvin Lee

have been designed to be inter-related right from the very beginning.

"We didn't create a foundation universe and then start adding characters later," Ulm says. "I've got a shipping schedule that goes all the way to February 1994. That enables us to foreshadow many things you couldn't do in a normal comic book set-up."

The germ of the *Ultraverse* idea came in August 1992, when Malibu was seeking a new line of titles with a unifying theme. Ulm says, "I pitched a bunch of different approaches. The one I liked best and had done the most advance work on was, 'Why don't we build a universe by getting the writers first, by finding people who make their livings telling stories and bringing them together to tell an even larger story?' "

With that revolutionary strategy in mind, Ulm and his colleagues began contacting established writers whose work they admired. They piqued the interest of an eclectic mix of talents and, in October 1992, flew most of them to a resort for four days of intensive brainstorming. Armed with notepads, a battery of Macintosh Powerbooks and a collective consciousness of the entire history of comics, the *Ultraverse* team set to work building an alternate reality.

According to Ulm, the success of the *Ultraverse* retreat exceeded his expectations. "It was terrific. The whole was definitely more than the sum of its parts. We had tons and tons of material. I thought we might need to be jump-started for ideas, but that wasn't the case at all."

Given the disparate personalities involved, were there any territorial disputes during the getaway, or bruised feelings at not snagging the most prized ideas? Ulm believes that there was such a wealth of possibilities that "nobody felt like a pauper. Nobody was holding back and keeping things for themselves."

As a case in point, Ulm mentions how a concept by Bob Jacob, president of Malibu Interactive, was picked up and expanded by two writers. "Bob had this idea for a kid who becomes a hero but is still a young teenager inside an adult body. We both really liked the idea, and when we brought it up during group discussions, Len Strazewski and Gerard Jones jumped right on it. They immediately wanted to do it as a continuing book."

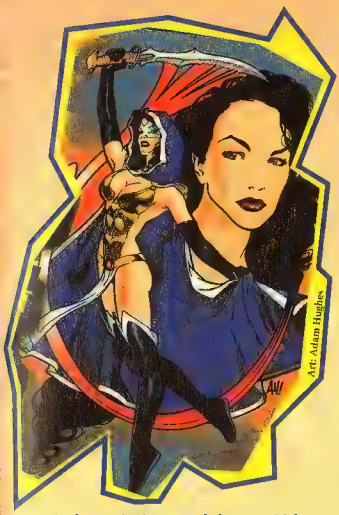
That book will be *Prime*, one of the first *Ultraverse* offerings. The notes from that marathon bull session were compiled, discussed and further refined into an *Ultraverse* "bible" that now numbers more than 200 pages. Noted SF writer Larry Niven, author of *Ringworld* and *The Mote in God's Eye*, came in, brought his out-of-this-world ideas to the table and helped assure that this imaginary world was logically consistent. While working on their individual assignments, the other writers kept in touch via phone and computer bulletin board.

Malibu also selected an impressive roster of artists to bring the *Ultraverse* to life on the printed page. They include well-known veterans like Art Adams, Dave Gibbons, Darick Robertson and Walt Simonson, as well as such relative newcomers as Chris Wozniak, Hoang Nguyen and Paul Pelletier.

**A June release, *Hardcase* teams writer James Hudnall and penciller Jim Callahan on the former Squad member's story.**

***Prime*, out this month, harnesses the talents of Len Strazewski, Gerry Jones and Norm Breyfogle.**

***The Strangers'* (clockwise from upper right: Yrial, Lady Killer, Grenade, Atom Bob, ElectroCute, Zip Zap and Spectral) monthly exploits come from writer Steve Englehart, penciller Rick Hoberg and inker Tim Burgard.**




**In the continuing struggle between Light and Darkness, Mantra fights a familiar battle as written by Mike Barr and illustrated by Terry Dodson.**

As unusual as the genesis of the *Ultraverse* might be, you could say that it's really only "backstory." Readers want to know what they're going to get for their money. So what will the *Ultraverse* titles actually provide comics fans?

For $1.95, *Ultraverse* readers will get 24 color pages of superhero action in every 32-page book. All the *Ultraverse* titles are *continuing* series, with *no* mini-series currently scheduled. Available both to the direct market and through newsstand circulation, the books boast covers marked with a distinctive *Ultraverse* logo.

*Hardcase*, scheduled for release this month, is the first title out of the gate. Scripted by James Hudnall, with character designs by Dave Gibbons and art by Jim Callahan, *Hardcase* highlights the adventures of a super-powered actor named Tom Hawke. A former member of The Squad, one of the first "Ultragroups," Hawke struggles with his film career while coping with guilty secrets from the past.

Hudnall, who created *ESPers* for Eclipse and wrote *The Psycho* mini-series for DC (CS #21), says he patterned Hardcase after the original 1930s Superman, the one who couldn't fly and wasn't the next thing to invincible.

"Inside, Hardcase feels like a regular guy," Hudnall says. "He tries to lead a normal life, but can't. How he got his powers is a mystery that won't be revealed for a while."

Hudnall is also scripting a team book entitled *The Solution*. With character designs by Nguyen, pencils by Wozniak and inks by John Lowe, it focuses on a group of supermercenaries. The first issue hits the stands in September.

"*The Solution* deals more with the gritty underside of the Ultraverse," the writer says. "They're freelance trouble-shooters whose ad reads, 'Got a problem? We're the Solution.' Of the four members, two are technologically enhanced, two magically enhanced. The stories take place around the world and allow me to do the hard-hitting action stories I like."

Hudnall sees the *Ultraverse* as an opportunity to bring a more contemporary sensibility to superhero comics. "Many of the superheroes of the '50s and '60s were created by middle-aged guys who grew up in Brooklyn," he says, "people who read pulp magazines in the '30s and watched B-movies in the '40s. We're relatively young guys who've had the advantage of seeing the most technologically advanced films available, like *Terminator 2* and *ALIENS*. That's what we're competing against, so our comics have to be much more plausible in terms of character and action."

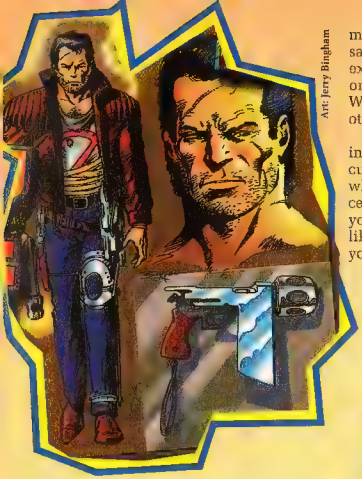
Gerard (*Green Lantern*) Jones and Len (*Justice Society of America*) Strazewski put a new spin on the old Captain Marvel archetype in *Prime*, the story of Kevin Green, a normal 13-year-old boy who suddenly develops the ability to grow a new, incredibly powerful body. Designed by Bret Blevins, *Prime* is drawn by Norm Breyfogle and debuts this month.

Jones outlines the basic premise. "One night, this mass of organic matter comes bursting out of Kevin's chest and forms a big body around him. He gradually learns to control it; he thinks and it responds. After the new body has taken some abuse, though, it starts to decay, and Kevin finds himself trapped inside this big, gelatinous body."

As with *Hardcase*, readers won't immediately learn how the protagonist got his powers, and Jones is willing to

**Super powers aren't always welcome, just ask Freex. Gerry Jones and Ben Herrera start their adventures in July.**

**Len Strazewski and Tom Mason, with art by David Ammerman and James Pascoe, tell of corporate wars going to extremes in *Prototype*, out in August.**



Art: Jerry Bingham

How does a non-powered hero fit into the Ultraverse? For Alexander Swan—otherwise known as Firearm—it's a matter of surviving. James Robinson scripts this September release.

If you have a problem, James Hudnall, Chris Wozniak and John Lowe will have *The Solution* this September.

Art: Paul Pelletier

Infected by a deadly virus, eight misfits become Exiles, trying to save themselves and others. This August book is written by Steve Gerber, pencilled by Paul Pelletier and inked by Ken Branch.

With the ability to hear evil intentions, Nightman (yes, *Nightman*) tracks them before they can get to you. Steve Englehart and Darick Robertson weave his tale starting this October.

make only the smallest admission. "It's safe to say he's the product of a secret experiment. He's supposed to be only one of a number of such creatures. We'll eventually find out that there are others who aren't as nice as Kevin."

Jones says he wants to avoid "cute" in this series and explore some difficult issues. "To some extent, this whole thing is a metaphor for adolescence. Your body's suddenly changing, you're more competent and you feel like you can leave your parents. But you also discover that it's kind of scary and complicated and emotionally wrenching to do so. And we don't want to soft-pedal that."

Strazewski agrees. "This is a story about the impact of real violence on a young man who has grown up thinking only about fantasy violence. He has all sorts of problems, but he's very dedicated to the heroic ideal."

Jones and Strazewski collaborate in what Strazewski describes as a "tag-team format." They co-plot everything, and then one takes a crack at a first draft. The other looks it over, makes some corrections and sends it back for another go-round.

The writers find this method mutually agreeable. Strazewski says, "I've always viewed Gerry as the kind of writer who does very chatty stories with lean dialogue and hard-core action. Now that we're reading each other's scripts, our approaches are much closer than we ever thought. We're both strongly character-oriented and have a sense that the action should be driven by the logical outcomes of the characters' personalities. Neither of us is interested in the kinds of books where someone says, 'Hi. I'm a hero. Let's fight.' "

Art: Hoang Nguyen

Jones and Strazewski both have other projects set in the *Ultraverse*. Jones', second book is *Freex*, the story of a group of teenagers coping with disfiguring and uncontrollable powers. Pressure, for example, shoots high-powered blasts of steam when she gets angry. Boom Boy looks like an Easter Island statue come to grotesque life. Sweetface's body is covered with ropy tendrils. Plug is a computer geek able to physically enter the data stream and incorporate electronic equipment into his body.

They and others run away from home for various reasons and, brought together by Plug, wind up living in an abandoned hotel in San Francisco, forming a small street gang. They don't intend to be heroes at first, but events will move them that way.

"I want to get to what Stan Lee and Jack Kirby could have done with the X-Men but never really did," Jones notes, "playing up the paranoia and persecution. The Freex don't have a wise mentor with infinite resources. They're just trying to survive in a hostile world."

Walt Simonson designed the characters for *Freex*. Ben Herrera is the regular artist.

Strazewski is co-writing *Prototype*, a new twist on the corporate armored hero, with Tom Mason of *Dinosaurs for Hire* fame and Malibu's Creative Director. Penciller David Ammerman designed the character. James Pascoe inks. Issue #1 is slated for August.

"I've always been dissatisfied with *Iron Man*," Strazewski says, "because

Art: Darick Robertson

I'm primarily a business journalist and I've always thought Tony Stark would be booted right out the door by his board of directors and stockholders. So, I wanted to do an action superhero who really is part of a corporation, subject to corporate politics, financial stresses and the incredible image demands put on people."

According to Strazewski, the book features more than one Prototype. "There's an old one who's suing the company for wrongful discharge. There's Prototype B, a Hispanic teenager chosen for his enhanced strength and reaction time. And then there are a couple of secret Prototypes floating around."

Steve Englehart, whose long career includes acclaimed runs on *Doctor Strange*, *Detective Comics* and *Captain America*, follows the fates of a highly diverse group of characters in *The Strangers*, slated to begin in June. When something called the "Jumpstart Effect" strikes a San Francisco cable car, it irrevocably alters nearly five dozen strangers. Throughout the series, Englehart weaves a complex tapestry of intersecting lives. The character design was done by Darick Robertson, Rick Hoberg is the regular artist.

"What I wanted to do was take a cross-section of ordinary people and throw them into the superhero business," Englehart explains. "It isn't like somebody killed their parents and they've sworn vengeance. The ones who end up hanging together do it because they don't know why the hell they've got these powers. It's very much a group that comes together out of rational necessity."

Atom Bob can transform things. Grenade can explode shrapnel out of his body. Lady Killer is a famous fashion designer who capitalizes on her new powers by wearing clothing that can be used as weapons. ElectroCute is an android built for pleasure who gains electrical powers and intelligence for the first time. Zip Zap is a black kid who can run fast and turn on a dime at 500 miles an hour. Spectral has seven powers based on seven colors, ranging from a red berserker rage to a protective violet.

Asked to describe *The Strangers* further, Englehart says, "It's a superhero book by somebody who likes superheroes. I'm not trying to find the gritty underbelly of things. That's *not* what I'm into."

Englehart's other series, *Nightman*, is also set in San Francisco. After suffering a skull fracture in the freak cable car accident that serves as the catalyst for *The Strangers*, jazz musician John Domino loses the ability to sleep but gains the power to psychically "hear" evil intentions. He devotes himself to dispensing justice on the seamy city streets.

"He can sense evil intent, but that's as far as it goes," Englehart says. Nightman can't read minds to find out where, when and how it's going to happen. "Much of it is about the evolution of a hero. Every other hero in the *Ultraverse* has one superpower or another. This guy has none, but he wants to play on the same field as the rest."

The last member of the Ultraverse to make an appearance is Solitaire, created by Gerry Jones and pencilled by Jeff Johnson.

Steve Gerber and Aaron Lopresti tell the story of a corrupt cop's ultimate transformation in October's *Sludge*.

Lady Killer takes her fashion background, designs The Strangers' costumes and also uses these talents as a weapon. Eventually, she'll lead the team.

Starting in July, Mike Barr chronicles the adventures of Lukasz, an eternal warrior, in *Mantra*. A foot soldier in the ongoing war between Darkness and Light, Lukasz finds himself inhabiting a female body, whose magical energy he must harness or face permanent death. Adam Hughes designed the character and Terry Dodson provides the art.

Steve Gerber's *Exiles* is another team title, slated to debut in August. It features eight misfits united by a deadly virus that has transformed them into ultrahumans. Gerber, creator of *Howard the Duck* and longtime chronicler of *Man-Thing*, describes it this way: "Think of it as if the X-Men were contagious." Paul Pelletier pencils the book and Ken Branch is the inker,

*(continued on page 60)*

# DEFIANT STEPS

***For Jim Shooter, Defiant is more than an attitude, it's comics.***

By MAUREEN McTIGUE

Layout & Design, Jim McLernon

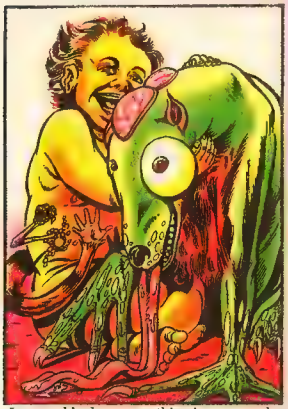
I had a conversation with Stan Lee out at the San Diego convention last August," recalls Jim Shooter, "and he heard about what happened [with Valiant] and he was outraged, he couldn't believe that things like that go on. So he said, 'What are you going to do?' I said, 'Start again. What else ?' At this stage, this is what I do. He said a couple of very nice things to me—he said, 'I really wish there was a way you could come back to Marvel. You were the best we ever had.' Stan Lee says something like that to you, that's totally cool. But at this point, I really would rather do it on my own. So, he said, 'You're going to start again? How old are you?' Forty-one. And he said,

'Well, I was the same age when I started Marvel.' There's a sign."

After almost 30 years in the comics industry, Shooter is starting again, with a new company, Enlightened Entertainment Partners, and his own comics imprint, Defiant. And, it's more than just a name.

"Whatever paths have led me here, things I've gone through up until now, *every* battle has made me tougher as far as I'm concerned; everything I've gone through has taught me things. And now I have arrived at that age, as Alan Weiss tells me, at the peak of my power and the same age Stan was, so it's time to create the *next* Marvel. And that's what we're going to do."

With a background that begins with Legion of Super Heroes, and works its way through Spider-Man and the Hulk up to Harbinger and Magnus, one may ask, why start all over from the beginning? Shooter's answer is simple and direct.



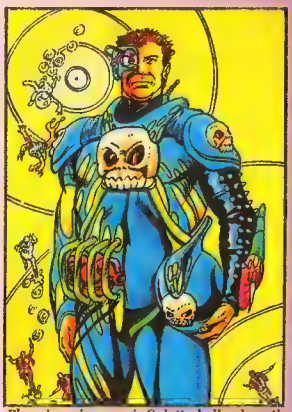
**In a world where everything is very much alive, a boy and his dog may not be quite what's expected.**

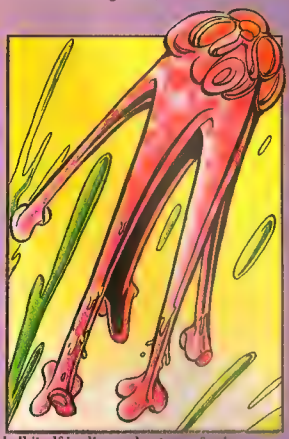
"I really *never* intended to leave Voyager. I had, shall we say, a falling out with my business partners. All I would like to say about it is that people there are trying to give the impression that there was some problem between me and creative people, and that's not true. It has to do with bankers and lawyers that you've never heard of, but part of the spin control process is to make it seem that way, other than what it really was."

Within Shooter's creation, the Defiant Universe, is *Plasm*, an organic world separated from our Earth by a "nanosecond-thin reality veil. Plasm is an extradimensional place," he explains.

As for the concept, "I don't know," he laughs, "I've always been interested in bio-engineering and genetics. When I sat down last fall to really think 'What am I going to do,' I started putting together ideas. There have been many things in the news about genetic engineering, and I came up with Plasm, that everything is alive.

To produce a team for a rebellion, Lorca crosses the reality veil between Earth and Plasm and brings back 10,000 Earthlings, who he plans to genetically alter into an army. His haste causes a miscalculation and only five—a middle-aged housewife, a one-armed working man, a soldier in the reserves, a college girl and an Episcopal minister—survive. An odd group to look at, but Shooter maintains that there's a reason for this teaming.





**Plasm's main game is Splatterball, where the ball itself is alive and not very fond of its predicament.**

"Basically, if you took Earth's biosphere, it all fits into a little thin layer—that's the surface, the oceans and a little bit of the atmosphere, it's a really thin layer. The way I see it, life seems to be striving to enter new niches all the time. What if you take that to the logical extreme, what if life wins the battle against the environment, and everything ends up becoming overwhelmed by life. That was the basis for Plasm.

"In Plasm," Shooter continues, "since these people are able to engineer on that atomic scale, and can grow their technology in a vat, obviously they would be able to grow humanoid type things. So for convenience's sake, they have created quite a few of these laborers or functionaries, Zoms. And the people who are non-Zoms are freethinkers. Lorca is probably a very free freethinker. Through a series of events which are unfolded in *Plasm* #0 [the trading card issue out this month from The River Group], Lorca changes his mind about the society he lives in and the way it all works. He starts to see value in individual life as opposed to considering himself just a cell in the body of the ecosystem. That's heresy in Plasm, so he doesn't make it too public, because he's in a good position to pull a coup since he has lost faith in the Org [Organism] of Plasm."

"The reason is because I know all those people," he says matter-of-factly. "When I first started writing comics, I was a kid, I was winging it. I hadn't taken any training or anything like that. I always thought I was cheating, because I wasn't good enough to make up characters. I would just use my friends, borrow their personalities and make them into characters. When I'm creating a character, I try to start with someone I know, and sometimes it's two people who I put together, and build the character around a real personality. Each of those people is someone I know and understand, and I think that they make an interesting set because, just like in real life, it's random.

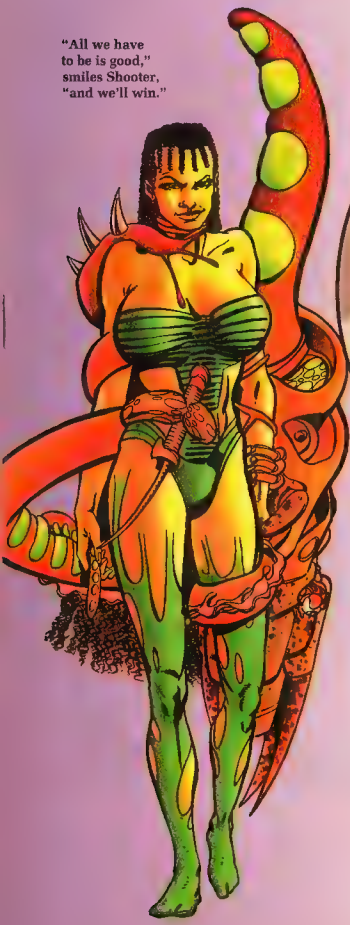
"I can't stand it when they have one of each ethnic type. 'Oh, sheer coincidence, one of every ethnic type has arrived.' I'm all in favor of having every kind of person imaginable in our comics, but I hate that sort of politically convenient gathering. One of these characters happens to be black, and two happen to be women. It's just a normal mix. If you took five people at random from Bethel Park, Pennsylvania, this is about what you would find."

I have some very good people working with me," Shooter says of the Defiant team. "David Lapham was, well, I guess he was dismissed by Voyager; his crime was that he was my friend. He did some work for DC, and then when we started up, he came to work for me. He's my Jack Kirby. I'm not sure if I'm Stan Lee, but I'm pretty sure he's Jack Kirby.

"He's fantastic. He's one of the guys that I started out doing very basic layouts, worry about what's *in* the panel, not its shape. Now, if you look at his work, he has become extremely graphic and extremely creative in his telling of the story. He's at the point now where he has the fundamentals under control and can afford to experiment. I did the same thing with Frank Miller. I forced him to draw square panels for awhile, and once he understood what he was doing, he took off like a rocket and became *Frank Miller.* So, Dave went through the same evolution, and now he's pretty hot stuff."

Also re-teaming with Shooter from Valiant are creative director Janet Jackson, former writer of *Eternal Warrior* (CS #28) and a well-known colorist, office manager Debbie Fix and Winston Fowlkes, "the man who helped me start Voyager, who has been in publishing all his life."

There are new faces as well, like Deborah Purcell and Mike Witherby. "Mike has been doing inking for Marvel, and now he's going to ink *Plasm.* The stuff looks great," Shooter says. "He's a very talented fellow.



**"All we have to be is good," smiles Shooter, "and we'll win."**

**"I wanted to start with something that would blow [everyone's] socks off visually and graphically," says Jim Shooter.**

"Deborah's an interesting case. She was fiction editor at *Redbook,* and that is probably one of the most important and notable jobs in fiction. I got her intrigued with comics as a visual medium, so for the first time in the history of comics, I'm going to get a world-class editor and teach her comics, as opposed to finding someone who has read 20,000 comic books and teaching them to be an editor. I'm very pleased with the results so far, she's brilliant."

I wanted to start out with something spectacular," Shooter enthuses. "My plan is to do the opposite of what I did at Valiant. There, I did a bunch of series on real Earth, although one of them was in the future, and then I took all the continuity into a different dimension—the lost land in

**They may seem odd, but the Defiant Earth heroes are a normal mix that can be found anywhere.**

*Unity,* in a big spectacular visual adventure with flying dinosaurs and you name it. Then, I was going to bring back a whole bunch of things from that extra-dimensional adventure which would bring some fantastic home. For instance, our plan for Turok was to get him back to modern day with dinosaurs to chase, and I guess they're doing that. Many other things were going to be spun out of that going to Unity and coming home.

"What I've decided to do this time is 'Why wait? Let's do Unity first.' Let's cut straight to the fantastic, and then when some of our *Plasm* characters cross back to Earth, they'll bring some of Plasm's fantastic elements. Most of the Defiant Universe takes place in the here and now on Earth, but we're starting with Unity and bringing it home.

"*Plasm* is the first series. The second series is *The Good Guys,* a young superhero group. I've been doing young superhero groups since I was 13, and I'm going to keep doing it till I get it right," he laughs. "That's a load of fun. *The Good Guys* is by Mike Barr and David Klein. David has been doing a lot of work for DC as a penciller—he's an inker too, a brilliant artist, and everyone knows who Mike Barr is.

"We're doing a series called *Wardancer* by Alan Weiss. Alan is probably one of the best talents in this business. He hasn't stuck around much on a regular series—he hasn't done the *X-Men* for 20 issues—so he's probably less well-known, but I think he belongs in the same class as the [Jim] Starlins,

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**The genetically-engineered Zoms, including these pleasure Zoms, are created explicitly for the freethinkers.**

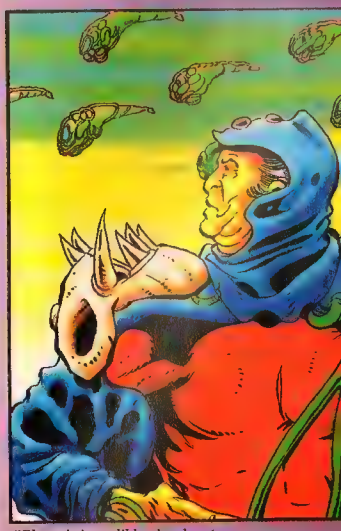
the [Steve] Engleharts and the other big name guys from that era, the Detroit crowd.

"I've got a series called *Dark Dominion*," Shooter continues, "it's by Steve Ditko and Steve Leialoha. Steve Ditko is going to re-create magic. He did it in the '60s, and he's doing it in the '90s. Think about it, before Steve Ditko did *Dr. Strange*, magicians in comics were guys who wore top hats and tails, and they either said things backwards and omnipotently they happened or they were fakes, they did hypnosis or something, like Mandrake. And then Steve comes along and does all this occult stuff, amulets, dimensions and demons. Now, that's all anybody does; they just do versions of Dr. Strange. Well, we're going to change the world again, and this time by doing magic that has a scientific foundation that'll blow people's minds. And working with Steve Ditko is great, he's one of the greatest storytellers ever. Steve Leialoha, one of the greatest inkers in the business, will give it a quality of finish that people will like. It's going to be graphic, beautiful and attractive, and it's going to revolutionize magic in comics.

"We also have a character and a title called *Charlemagne*, and it is *not* a historical drama. It's one of those gutsy, triumph of will over matter things that I've always liked. I did it with Starbrand, that's the nearest type of character I can relate it to. We have another character called Mongrel which was created by David Lapham. If you had to put him in a pigeon hole—none of these guys fit neatly into pigeon holes, these are Jim Shooter characters, all weird—he goes into that 'creature of the night' pigeon hole.

"There's a character that is unnamed—it's probably named but I don't know the name. It's by Chris Claremont, and it's coming soon. Chris has been helping us create the universe, he has signed on to consult with us as well as to write. And that's great, because I worked with Chris back in the days when *X-Men* was going from a crummy bi-monthly that nobody cared about to the number one book in the business. He's a team player and extremely talented. He's just one of those guys who likes to build things, likes work, he also attracts artists, artists fall from the heavens when Chris Claremont walks by, he has always been a good recruiter. Chris, more than anyone I've worked with, *loves* what he's doing, and he's not one of these guys who turns in the script and thinks the job is done. You just don't get that kind of commitment from most people and, it's sad to say, many people in this business really don't care, they just crank it out and that's it. Chris cares.

"Also, there are several other characters in the works. Nine titles, and we'll have more. Our goal is to eventually get to 16 or 18 titles, at which point I'll probably level it off, because that's as many as we can do and still keep very tight continuity and



**"*Plasm* is incredibly visual, outrageous, wild science fiction fantasy, very much based on real science and on a system of logic," Shooter says.**

All Art: David Lapham/Mike Witherby/Colors: Janet Jackson

**"We're going to have very tight continuity, and we're looking for people who want to play on the team," notes Shooter.**

make them good. A few of the other characters will be spin-offs from *Plasm*, and we have a couple of unique concepts. One's a title called *Prudence and Caution*, which is sort of the first male/female buddy book. At Valiant, I did *Archer & Armstrong*. The tendency is Batman and Robin, but they shouldn't get along and so with *Archer & Armstrong*, I did the first real kind of buddy book, which is done in movies all the time. And this time we have a concept—that grew out of characters by the way—we didn't set out to make a male/female buddy book, it just happened."

**The constant change that the *Plasm* characters are able to go through help enhance the visually stunning world.**

The reason I wanted to start with *Plasm*," Shooter explains, "is because *Plasm* is incredibly visual, outrageous, wild science fiction fantasy, very much based on real science and a system of logic that I think works. But it's outrageous, visual and startling. I wanted to start with that because people have me typecast, and they all expect to see the next *Harbinger*. Five kids and a mustang, real down to Earth. People forget, I've been doing this for 28 years, I've done a little of everything. I started with the Legion of Super Heroes, I've been inventing technology from the word go, and so people have the idea that I somehow don't care so much about the art, and they'll say things like, 'Well, look at the artists he used at Valiant, some of them you've never heard of.' Hey, that's because Valiant was a start-up company when start-up companies never made it. So at Valiant, I called up my old artists and buddies. Even the guys who are my friends, it's very hard for them to walk away from a steady job at Marvel to take a flyer at some new company.

"It was tough getting the established guys even if they said, 'Yeah, we'll work with you someday,' like if you survive your first year. So, we ended up with a bunch of kids from the Joe Kubert School, and a few older guys and when the kids are right out of school, you don't want them trying to be Frank Miller on their first day, you try to teach them fundamentals for a while. There was probably a more conservative nature to the artwork at Valiant at least at the beginning, than I like, or than I think many fans like. But if you get a kid who's struggling with his basic drawing and encourage him to do fancy layouts and double page spreads, you're going to get some unreadable layouts and ugly double page spreads. Like the pictures aren't good, why make them bigger? Oh then they'll be big and bad, that'll be great," he says with a hint of sarcasm.

"This time, however, because of Valiant's success, and because in general many small companies are now becoming contenders, artists and writers are calling me and saying, 'Hey, we would like to work with you.' So, I think we'll start with a more experienced crew, and therefore we'll be able to be more outrageous and more cutting edge in the artwork.

"I've been doing this a long time. People forget that I'm the guy who started *Epic Illustrated*, who started Epic Comics, who got Jon Muth to do *Moonshadow*—I had to talk Archie [Goodwin] into that one—I'm the guy who hired Bill Sienkiewicz the moment I saw him, and brought guys in who were wild and experimental. I'm the guy who said, 'Here Bill, take *New Mutants* and do what you want' on the assumption that in those days, if you're Marvel Comics and can't afford to experiment, who was going to? As far as I'm concerned, I see myself as this wild, outrageous, cutting-edge guy but also as a person who wants to teach fundamentals to beginners. Maybe the market only remembers what you did last year, so they may have the sense that I'm stodgy and conservative, which I am *not*. That's why I wanted to start with something that would blow their socks off visually, graphically and every other way."

When the question of fan reception and this summer's comics glut comes up, Shooter isn't defensive in any way. In fact, he's optimistic.

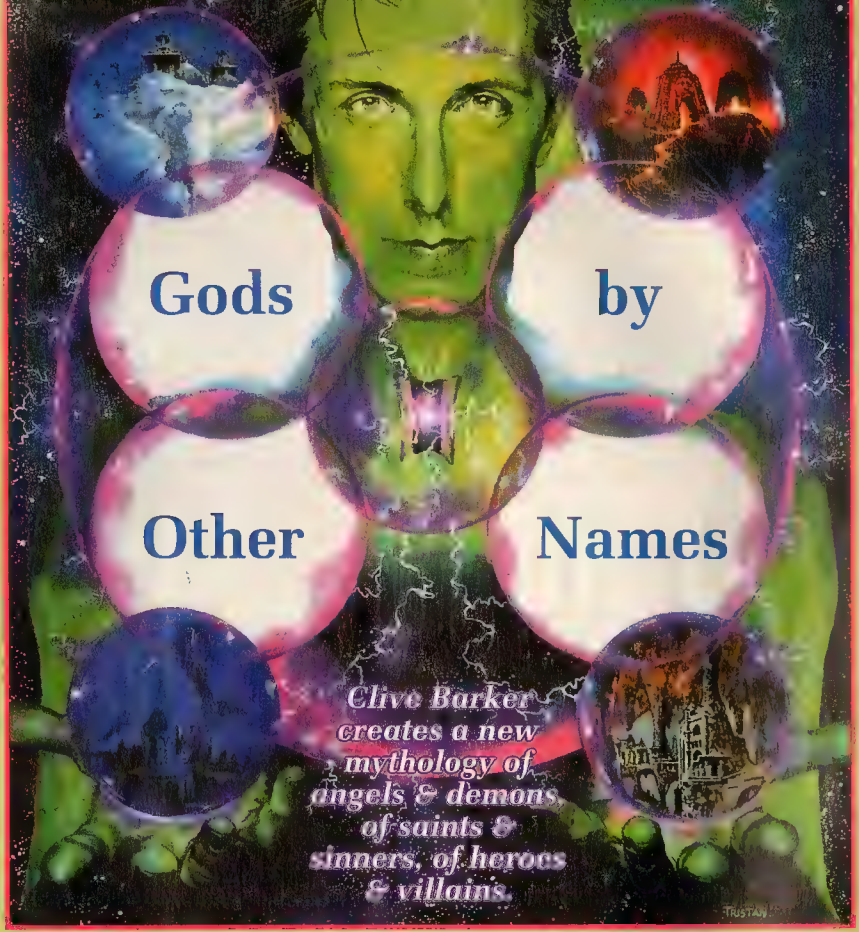
"I think this is the time, the *right* time. At Valiant, we had to struggle just to get everybody's attention, and once we had it, it was fine.

"Marvel's extremely vulnerable. They've been the industry leader with 50-60 percent of the market since I left there. I got them there, they've been

*(continued on page 62)*

Layout & Design: Calvin Lee

# Gods by Other Names




All Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Clive Barker/Courtesy Marvel Comics

Art: Tristan

**By BILL WARREN**

Clive Barker is a crowded room. There's Clive Barker the playwright, Clive Barker the painter, Clive Barker the short story writer and novelist, Clive Barker the screenwriter, Clive Barker the movie director, even Clive Barker the movie actor. Cheerfully overworked, Barker's a party wherever he goes—and now he's going even further into comic books.

He has read comic books all his life—at times, it seems as though he has read almost everything (and written the rest)—and is now plunging into his own line of comics for Marvel, the *Barkerverse* contained within the Razorline imprint. He loves superheroes, and the fact that "they are a trivialization of gods, that Euripides set on the stage tales of men and divinities mingling. What we have in the late 20th century," Barker says, "is the Fantastic Four—and my tongue *isn't* in my cheek when I say that."

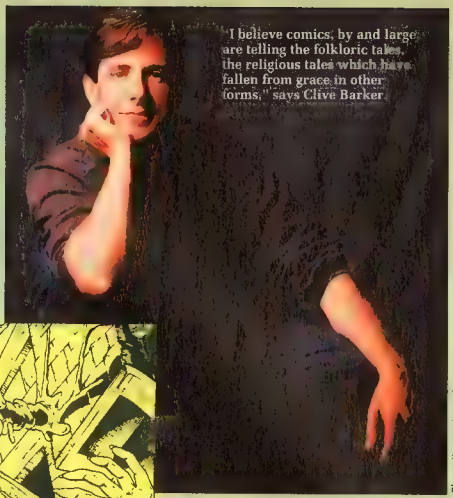
Barker's own pantheon consists initially of four titles and the heroes and villains within them. "I've wanted to do superheroes for a long time. We were having fun with the movie-related comic book material, the *Hellraiser* and *Nightbreed* stuff, but it was always by its very nature limited, because horror comics have a limited market.

"I was interested in creating mythologies that were close to the things I had read as a kid. I'm talking about the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Superman, Batman and so on, rather more on-the-nose sort of stuff. So, I went to Marvel, and said, 'Look, I really am eager to do this, but I feel as though I need to carve off a little section of comic-book reality to call mine.' Because otherwise I'm going to start treading on Marvel's rules and regulations, and I know they're relatively restricted."

So, one day over lunch with Tom DeFalco, Marcus McLaurin, Carl Potts and Mike Hobson, Potts offered Barker his own continuity, the *Barkerverse*. "I

Art: Max Douglas

**"*Saint Sinner* is the one that comes closest to the Clive Barker people will expect," the creator says.**



"I believe comics, by and large, are telling the folkloric tales, the religious tales which have fallen from grace in other forms," says Clive Barker.

Photo: Brigitte Jouxtel

Art: Steven Scroce/Bob Dvorak

**The spirit plane exists in the eyes of Dex Mungo. Well, actually, *one* of his eyes.**

then said I have four titles for you, and a cycle of 10 worlds, the Decamundi. These four titles will occur in these worlds, but I'll offer up the observation that at least several of these worlds will open internally into *other* worlds, so the Decamundi may be just the beginning of an expanding universe."

Barker launches into a description of each of his comics quartet. "*Saint Sinner* is perhaps, of the four titles, the one that comes closest to the Clive Barker people will expect, in the sense that it's preoccupied with devils, angels and physical transformations. It's about Phillip Fetter, a character who, as the title suggests, is a Saint Sinner, a living paradox, a character who's capable of immense, nearly divine good, and terrible, demoniacal evil, and has the power of both forces in him at the same time. He also has the power to evolve flesh, which is kind of an interesting idea. He can evolve and devolve it. Basically," Barker laughs, "his touch is Darwinian."

Fetter's soul has been invaded by the drives of both a demon, the Runesmith, and an angel, Regina. Other demonic forces try to lure him, then force him, into taking their part, but he manages to evade them with some fellow prisoners, and takes up residence in the Vertesque, a bizarre jungle dimension. "It's a cross between Grotesque and Vert, for green—the Green Grotesque. There he lives in this world of paradox and miracles before he comes to Earth. If I were to say the tone of it is like anything, I would say it's closest to what DC's doing in the Vertigo line, closest to *Sandman*, titles like that. But it has a new—I hope—series of interesting problems in it, set up for its characters, and hopefully a burst of poetry in its writing. Elaine Lee is doing the writing there. I was, and am, a huge fan of *Starstruck*, which I think was one of the most brave and elegant experiments in comic book storytelling." Max Douglas is handling the illustrating chores.

Barker is trying for a range of ideas and characters, but within traditional boundaries, too, so it's not surprising that he has a teenaged hero. "*Ectokid* is a superhero of a sort," he explains. "Our boy Dex—he thinks it's short for Dexter, but later discovers it's short for Ambidextrous, for reasons which will become apparent—discovers, around the age of puberty, that he's able to see *two* worlds.

"Out of his right eye, he sees the world as we know it; out of his left, he sees the Ectosphere, the world of ghosts. And he realizes that he's seeing the world as psychics see it, as a haunted place, a place full of extraordinary powers and forces for good and evil—though primarily for evil. It is the world from which humanity draws the myths of the incubus and succubus, and the poltergeist and the elf, and the demon and so on."

Dex Mungo lives by his wits and

fast fingers in the colorful streets of New Orleans, but when those streets start looking *really* colorful, encrusted with magic and mystery, he seeks out his mother, an emotional wreck who's now in a mental institution. "He says, 'Mum, I see weird visions out of my left eye.' And she says, 'That's your dad speaking. Your father was a ghost.'

"His mother was a medium, and raised this man from the dead, and they made love. Dex is the result, half-ghost, half-human, belonging both in the Ectosphere and the real world—the Ectokid. The Ectosphere occupies the same physical space as ours. That is to say, if you as Dex were sitting in your room right now, out of your right eye, you would see the room as you normally see it. Out of your left, you would see exactly the same physical geography, but it would be subtly changed in innumerable ways. Part of the fun of this is, I think, that the world Dex is living in isn't a remote world, a world that is not actually that different."

Barker is cautious about revealing too much, but he does admit that Dex discovers he has certain powers beyond that of simply seeing the Ectosphere. Also, there are the Brothers Augustine, the villainous Ice and Tom, who not only have something to do with Dex's father, but who know about the Aurat, a resurrection machine invented by him, a machine that powerful forces are trying to find.

"What we have here is an extraordinary, complex moral problem; he sees all this stuff, but he must work out how it relates to the real world. Most significantly, he has the same problem that Hamlet has. It turns out that, like Hamlet's father, Dex's father was murdered—for reasons the comics will slowly reveal. Dex's mission, his purpose, is to go through the real world and find out who murdered his father, and to go through the Ectosphere and find his father's ghost. So, there's a dual mission going on; both parts are deeply dangerous." *Ectokid* is written by James Robinson, pencilled by Steven Scroce and inked by Bob Dvork.

Barker has long been involved in show business, so it's not at all surprising that one of the *Barkerverse* titles touches that area, too. This is *Hokum & Hex*, written by Frank Lovece and pencilled by Anthony Williams. "I've always been a great fan of magic as a subject, and have felt that, by and large, with the exception of Dr. Strange, comics haven't really dealt with it as interestingly as I think it could be. *Hokum & Hex* is my take on how magic may operate in the late part of the 20th century.

"Trip Munroe is a failed standup comedian who is, by complete chance, given magical powers. He is presented with an awesome challenge that he's utterly incapable of carrying through with any great authority. He must use the powers he has been given to defend the planet from interdimensional attack, led by the great villain, Felon Bale—he's perhaps the most powerful villainous entity in the entire Decamundi," Barker says.

Trip has been left all the stage impediments and gadgetry of his great-grandfather "Sweet-Tooth" Munroe,

# RAZORLINE

**The Paxis powers are given to a new generation of heroes in *Hyperkind* to once again defeat the ancient evils.**

Art: Mark Pacella/Scott Hanna

Art: Anthony Williams/Andy Lanning

***Hokum & Hex* sets a Vaudeville-like stage by giving standup comedian Trip Munroe supernatural powers to save the Earth.**

# RAZORLINE

**"I'm a great fan of team superheroes," notes Barker. "They have caught my imagination." And thus he created Hyperkind.**

one of Vaudeville's unsung stars. When Godkin Straith, a contemporary of Felon Bale's, insists, according to the rules, that great power be given to someone on Earth, they end up in Trip and Sweet-Tooth's equipment, so he must battle the forces of evil with rabbits out of hats, rubber chickens and other comic devices. As the book progresses, so does the comic who's the star; he gradually gains confidence in using his amazing new powers.

"Finally," Barker goes on, "the most on-the-nose of the titles is *Hyperkind*. I'm a great fan of team superheroes, and that goes back to my first encounters with the Fantastic Four. They caught my imagination—and have continued to hold my imagination. *Hyperkind* postulates that in the 1940s, there was an extraordinary band of superheroes called Paxis, who defended the Earth from all comers, but were eventually destroyed by the machinations of a super-villain called Paragon John. He basically made sure that Hyperkind members were either destroyed or driven to madness.

"The powers of the Paxis were each preserved in a kind of sarcophagus. The last act of the leader, Eschbacher, was to preserve these powers. What happens now is that four kids (and then a surprise character), led by the dying Eschbacher, chance upon these charged-up sarcophagi and are granted the powers of superheroes from two generations earlier.

"So in a way," Barker continues, "what we're doing is postulating the existence of a comic that never existed, a Golden Age comic called *Paxis*. And Hyperkind are the spiritual grandchildren of a generation of superheroes that fought for justice and goodness in the purest sense, and fell, as it turns out, because of frailties within themselves. Paragon John is powerful, but couldn't have succeeded in Paxis' destruction if they had not been intrinsically flawed."

The first to gain the powers—in her case, those of Eschbacher himself—is Lisa Moffitt. She has his ability to fly, to survive in any environmental extreme, and to use any physical object as an extension of her own body. Kenny, her sometime boy friend, has

I'VE HAD ENOUGH FROM WHERE I STAND!
LET'S SEE HOW 'OL CUT IT AGAINST SOMEONE YOUR OWN SIZE!
THREE AGAINST ONE, THEY WAXX!
I THINK WE'VE EVENED THE ODDS
THINK AGAIN, YOUNG FOOLS

Art: Mark Pacella/Scott Hanna

Art: Steven Scroce/Rudi Dvorak

**Dex Mungo "sees all this stuff, but he must work out how it relates to the real world," the creator notes.**

become a mathematical titan; he can instantly calculate any probability, and the weaknesses in their enemies. Kenny's friend George Yoneda, who loves action, is the group's wild man; he can telepathically communicate with animals. Dyan, Lisa's rival for Kenny's affections, has become a dream manipulator, who can conjure up in reality the dream creatures of *any* sentient being. And there will eventually be a fifth member of Hyperkind, but not yet, not yet....

Barker is quite gleeful about the possibilities in the Fred Burke-written, Mark Pacella-pencilled and Scott Hanna-inked *Hyperkind*. "We have children, adolescents, of today, charged up with powers infinitely more complex than they at first realize, dealing with people who have believed that their sometimes nemeses have disappeared—and are now pissed off to discover that a new generation are here. I think what we may bring to this which is new, and what Fred Burke is certainly doing, is to exploit the kind of interesting energy that comes from a clash of generations. And, of course, a mystery—that mystery being what killed the Hyperkind in the first place, and how it can be stopped from happening again."

However, Barker won't be writing any of the titles. "I think my job here is hopefully to create some mythologies that writers and artists will, in years to come, find intriguing and bring their own things to. I want to be democratic about this: I'm the pump primer here. My attitude is much as it is with the *Hellraiser* sequels—that I will watch over this stuff, and give support, encouragement and ideas when requested. But my initial gift, if you like, is the gift of an idea that I hope will be rich enough to encourage diverse hands and imaginations to play with."

Barker hopes to bring something a little new to the field of superhero comics. "One thing readers will get is diversity within a system. One of the interesting things about the four titles is that they're all radically different from one another. Clearly, we're pushing some ideas to further extremes than have been pushed in the Marvel world before. There will be, I hope, an intensity to this stuff that may be missing in other titles, simply because some of them may have run their course in terms of what you can get out of characters. I think there's a kind of complexity to the underlying ideas which will be illuminating, a rich area for both writer and reader."

The writer's enthusiasm is infectious; he's one of those people whose brilliance illuminates those around him, so that when you're talking with him, you can feel your own horizons expanding—you come out of a conversation with Barker a better-informed, more imaginative person than when you went in. He's a tonic.

Essentially, Barker still has the viewpoint of an outsider to the comics world, but that of an interested, involved outsider. "What's notable about the perspective I can bring is that I'm trying to marry up the creator of 900-page novels and 90-minute movies with the guy who flips through a 20-page comic book every month, and put these together. There's a narrative challenge here, a storytelling challenge. The fundamental thrust of any of these activities, writing a novel, making a movie, making a comic book, is *telling a story*. You always start with Once Upon a Time—you start with the hook of a narrative which you hope is going to make people flip the 20 pages, watch the two hours of the movie, read the 900 pages of the novel. Those challenges are comparable."

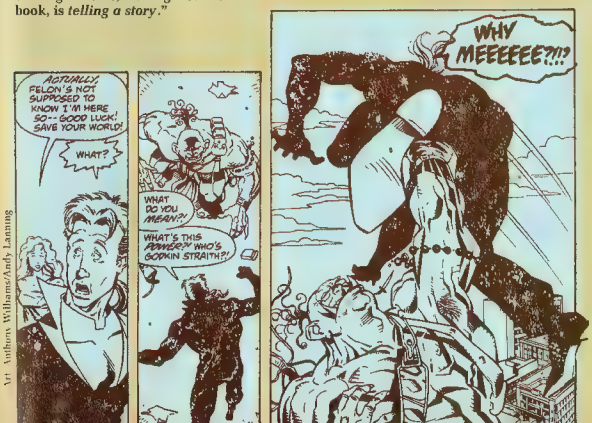
Art: Max Douglas

**Bringing his particular blend of the fantastic into good old-fashioned comics, Barker will certainly set some minds turning.**

Barker admires the obsessive nature of comics fans—and creators—but has a somewhat more Olympian perspective, almost literally. "One of the interesting things about populist art is how you can often reach conclusions that very much more sophisticated minds take a long time to reach, because of the kind of raw, Jungian instincts. I believe in the collective unconscious, and that it populates the world with gods and demons. And these brightly-colored creatures, who descend from the stars with powers that are superhuman, in order to save us from our own worst instincts and those who would destroy us, are gods by other names.

"I believe comics, by and large, are telling the folkloric tales, the religious tales which have fallen from grace in other forms. We still need those miraculous tales, we still need to know that there's a hand to save us, should we fail. And it will not be a human hand. I think we need the comfort of these stories just as we need the ghost story and the urban legend. We need a sense of the divine, we need (as in the title of a wonderful book by Peter Berger) a rumor of angels. We need to know that something miraculous is around the corner. And even if we don't believe this is actually happening in our world, we can gather for a while around a campfire and hear ghost tales, or we can sit and read of heroes." CS

**"The fundamental thrust of any of these activities, writing a novel, making a movie, making a comic book, is *telling a story*."**


ACTUALLY, FELON'S NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW I'M HERE SO--GOOD LUCK! SAVE YOUR WORLD!
WHAT?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHAT'S THIS ABOUT? WHO'S DOIN' IT?
WHY MEEEEEE?!!?

Art: Anthony Williams/Andy Lanning

# WELCOME TO DAKOTA

By JOE NAZZARO

***Milestone Media unwraps a new universe of urban realities.***

OF COURSE OFFICER, BUT IF YOU'LL GIVE ME A MOMENT TO EXPLAIN—
ICON! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I'M COMPLYING WITH THE OFFICER'S REQUEST, AS I EXPECT YOU TO.
I AIN'T NO CRIMINAL, AND I AIN'T COMPLYING WITH SQUAT.
YOU'LL DO WHAT YOU'RE TOLD.
OR WHAT'S YOU GONNA HIT ME, HE-MAN?

Art: M.D. Bright/Mike Gustovich/Cabes/John Cebollero

Back in the mid-70s, two teenagers named Derek Dingle and Denys Cowan were disappointed by the lack of African-American lead characters in their favorite comics. There was the Black Panther, who was part of the Marvel Universe since the early days of *The Fantastic Four*, and Luke Cage, the tough-talking "hero for hire," who came along many years later, but that was about it. For a pair of impressionable young men looking for role models, the choices were severely limited.

Twenty years later, Dingle and Cowan decided to fill that gap in the marketplace, and along with partners Dwayne McDuffie and Michael Davis,

**Icon and Rocket's different philosophies separate true teamwork, but they have many of the same goals.**

hey formed Milestone Media, a new company devoted to addressing the lack of minority representation in comics. Dingle became President, with Cowan as Creative Director. McDuffie is Editor-in Chief and primary writer and Davis the Director of Talent Development.

What makes Milestone's creation even more significant is the distribution deal they signed with DC Comics. Under the agreement, Milestone provides a full line of finished books, and DC then handles the printing, marketing and distribution. While such deals are commonplace in the film and television business, this is the first time for the comics scene.

To launch the Milestone Universe, they've created four new books—*Hardware*, *Blood Syndicate*, *Icon* and *Static* –each of which takes place in the fictional city of Dakota. The first out of the gate is *Hardware*, written by McDuffie and drawn by Cowan and inker Jimmy (*Punisher 2099*) Palmiotti. Hardware is Curtis Metcalf, a brilliant inventor working for Edwin Alva, Dakota's leading businessman. "He has a father/son relationship with Alva," explains Dingle, "who at the same time is at the head of corruption in Dakota. What Curtis discovers is that the relationship wasn't as personal as he thought, and Alva was using him to further his ends. Curtis feels betrayed, and when he finds out about Alva's corrupt empire, he decides to dismantle it from within."

"This is a very confused man," adds McDuffie, "who has much to learn about himself and about life before he can become a hero. I see it as a book about a character overcoming his own worse instincts. He feels a strong sense of personal betrayal by a man he loves, and he's lashing out like a kid."

Using his skill as an inventor, Metcalf designs a state-of-the-art cybernetic battlesuit, and begins a hi-tech war against Alva's criminal empire. With a wide array of futuristic weapons at his disposal, including an omnicannon, micro-rockets, a neural net and a polarized metallic shell, comparisons between Hardware and Marvel's Iron Man seem inevitable, but McDuffie promises major differences between the two armored heroes. "My theory with Hardware is that first of all, we make you see him load up with the stuff he's taking with him. Unlike Iron Man, there's a weight limit he can carry, most of his devices only have one or two shots, and he can only fly for about three minutes with his jet pack. We're trying to make him less overwhelming. He'll have to depend more on his own head.

"Hardware's the kind of guy you don't want to fight twice. If you beat him the first time, he'll go home and build something specifically intended to deal with what you got him with.

"As far as the armory goes, you've pretty much seen the stuff he uses on a consistent basis. Occasionally, he'll invent and use something new, but whenever he does, you'll see it coming. He's not going to pull it out of his utility belt. In fact, if you look carefully at the issues that have already published, you'll see him working on things in the background that will show up later on," McDuffie explains.

Art: Denys Cowan/Jimmy Palmiotti. Layout & Design: Jim McLernon

**Real life in the inner city is reflected in the pages of *Blood Syndicate*.**

Art: Denys Cowan/Jimmy Palmiotti

**"I see it as a book about a character overcoming his own worst instincts," says Dwayne McDuffie of *Hardware*.**

Photo: Courtesy Milestone Media

**Michael Davis, Derek Dingle, Dwayne McDuffie and Denys Cowan are the backbone of this new world: Milestone.**

In an interesting scheduling move, Milestone released the first four issues of *Hardware* on a bi-weekly basis, in order to complete the character's origin more quickly. "The important thing at Milestone is that our readers get something of value," maintains Cowan, "which is why our price is $1.50, and why *Hardware* was bi-weekly.

"One of the things we wanted to do was have a Milestone book on the stands every week. It would show our readers that we're here, we're committed and we're *not* going to have late books. One way to do that was to come out bi-weekly with full issues, which is very hard to do. We have a *long* way to go, but we wanted to start out by making a statement.

"Of course, they chose me to draw the bi-weekly issues," adds Cowan with a laugh. "The readers don't know how much that cost me!"

BUT MAYBE, I THOUGHT, NOT BEYOND MY REACH.
USING ALVA'S OWN EQUIPMENT AND RESOURCES I CREATED HARDWARE--
--THE HIGH-TECH CREATURE OF THE NIGHT WHO'S BEEN CHECKMATING ALVA'S ILLEGAL OPERATIONS FOR THE LAST TEN MONTHS, IS IN A WAY, ALVA'S OWN CREATION.
:NEH! IT'S SURELY HIS PROPERTY...

Art: Denys Cowan/Jimmy Palmiotti/Colors: Noelle Giddings

**A gifted inventor, Hardware will "have to depend on his own head more."**

The second Milestone title is *Blood Syndicate*, possibly the most controversial of the company's core books. Written by McDuffie and Ivan (*Tales of the Closet*) Velez Jr. and drawn by newcomer Chriscross (who replaces original artist Trevor Von Eeden), *Blood Syndicate* is an uncompromising look at the world of gang violence. "You have a group of characters," says Dingle, "who have developed as a result of the Big Bang, the Dakota Mayor's attempt to clean up gang violence in the city. She brings the police down, who spray the area with tear gas that has radioactive markers, so they can track down escaping gang members.

"But, the police action goes awry, and a number of the gang members are killed, except for the ones who eventually become the Blood Syndicate. They're members of Dakota's different gangs, and what you get is almost a metaphor for street gangs as a family."

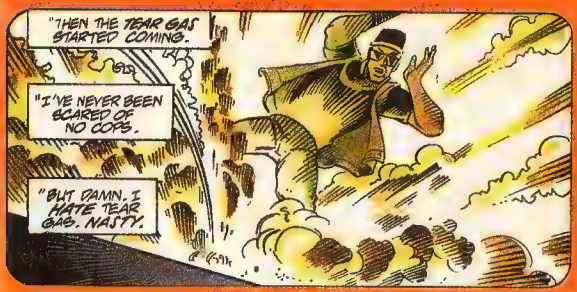
The members of Blood Syndicate include Tech-9, a walking arsenal who never runs out of bullets; Holocaust, a power-hungry pyrotechnic; Fade, who can pass through solid objects; Wise Son, whose ultra-dense molecular structure makes him invulnerable; DMZ, the group's silent member, who possesses superhuman strength and sensory enhancement; Masquerade, a shape-changer; Flashback, Fade's sister, who can "step back" three seconds in time; Third Rail, an energy absorber who grows to enormous size; and Brickhouse, the bizarre result of a fusion between a gang member and a brick wall.

According to Dingle, the team members' divergent backgrounds will make for some fascinating storylines. "Tech-9 comes from a street gang that was more community-oriented, while Holocaust comes from a more aggressive gang. The conflict between them in the first issue is that one wants to plot a logical plan for survival, and if along the way they can do something to improve the community, that would be an added benefit. Holocaust is the one who wants raw power—that's what he's about.

"Flashback is someone with a drug problem, which we'll deal with later on. Fade is her brother, and that relationship is going to get pretty interesting. Then, you have Wise Son, who pretty much has a Muslim philosophy. What we wanted to show was personal conflict, and how you can have different viewpoints but still come together to achieve a goal. It's also a fun book, an exciting book and there's a story or message you get that addresses many issues. How can different individuals come together within a group?"

Art: N.D. Bright/Mike Gustovich

**"The primary rule in our universe is that actions have consequences," McDuffie observes—and Rocket finds that out.**



Art: James Fry, Andrew Pepoy/Colors: Michelle Wrightson

**Tech-9 explains the Big Bang, according to Paris Island reality. In an effort to clean up the gang situation, the Mayor gassed and killed many.**

Adds Cowan, "It's almost like what if the X-Men really existed, which I find far more interesting. If you were all together, you would never get along, you would always be thinking about how to get attention, how 'I'm going to get mine,' yet you're forced to stay together. There's your conflict: They don't hang out in the Danger Room; the Danger Room is their world."

One of the major differences between *Blood Syndicate* and other group books is its very realistic treatment of violence, and the repercussions of violence."The primary rule in our universe is that actions have consequences," says McDuffie. "If you punch someone through a wall, it *hurts*. If someone gets shot, they bleed, and yet you can't deal with this kind of violence and tell people there are no consequences. That goes across our entire line. Hardware killed some people in the first issue—he was absolutely wrong—and he will pay for it."

"With *Blood Syndicate*, unless you have powers," claims Dingle, "if you're shot, you stay down. That's the reality. In *Hardware* #1, where he took this guy's arm off, it's gone. You have fantasy elements in this reality-based environment, and when you deal with the reality, you question more of the morality. The morals have more weight, because what you're seeing happens in our society every day. If someone gets hit by a bus and then stands up, there's really no consequence. It's cartoonish..."

"Because you know it *can't* happen," finishes Cowan. "A lot of the violence in *Blood Syndicate*, the down-and-dirty violence as well as the mental violence, can be much scarier because you can relate to it. That's why we feel that the violence in *Blood Syndicate* affects you much more than any other titles, because it's *real* violence."

Art: John Paul Leon/S. Mitchell/Colors: Noelle Giddings

**"As Static," notes Derek Dingle, "he can create this cool persona, but does it change him from being a geeky kid?"**

Art: Berry, Cowan/Manley, Colors: Noelle Giddings

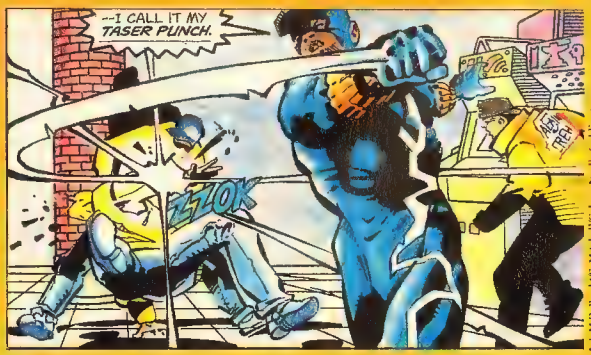
**"The actions that occur in one book will affect the others," says McDuffie. "If you read all four, it's a much richer experience."**

In contrast to the reluctant heroes of *Blood Syndicate*, Milestone's third book, *Icon*, written by McDuffie and drawn by Mark (*Green Lantern*) Bright and Mike Gustovich, presents a slightly more traditional superhero. Icon is actually an alien being, whose spaceship crashed in the Deep South in 1839. After reconfiguring itself into human shape, the being was discovered by a slave woman, who adopted the baby as her own.

Today, the alien has become successful attorney Augustus Freeman IV, who secretly uses his super powers to aid Dakota citizens. When a young woman from a nearby housing project convinces him to do something more for his community, he dons a costume and becomes the superhero Icon. The girl, Raquel Ervin, christens herself Rocket and assumes the role of the hero's conscience.

One of the major sources of conflict in *Icon* is the difference in political ideologies between the two main characters. Dingle elaborates, "With Icon, you have someone who is a political conservative, as a function of being a black man in America for 150 years. Many people that grew up from slavery adopted Booker T. Washington's philosophy, which is pretty much the cornerstone of black conservative thought in America: Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, not taking anything from the government, being self-sufficient, and what have you.

"Couple that with Rocket, a young woman from the inner city, who has opposing ideas about how black Americans should operate. You have a debate of these political ideas being carried forward, but you also have two people who challenge each other to become better individuals," continues Dingle. "She charges Icon with becom-




Art: M.D. Bright/S. Mitchell/Colors: Noelle Giddings

**Static must deal with the responsibilities of his powers. "There will be positive and negative forces tugging at him," notes Dingle.**

Art Icon: Von Eeden/Andrews Peppoy/Colors Janet Jackson

**"What we wanted to show [with Blood Syndicate] was personal conflict," says Dingle. "and how you can have different viewpoints but still come together to achieve a goal."**

ing a hero, and Icon charges her with becoming more responsible.

"In the first issue, we talked about Rocket and her inspiration, which is Toni Morrison, and after being with Icon, she quotes William DuBois about the need for exceptional men. I think that type of dialogue, these type of images, you don't often see in comics."

Although *Icon* is ostensibly about its title character, the Milestone creators insist that Rocket, who is much more than a teen sidekick, will be getting plenty of attention. "Do you know *why* teen sidekicks were first invented?" asks Cowan. "It was because the editors of those comic books needed someone to identify with. They could never hope to be Batman, but they could be Robin, so it was an entrance to that world, which of course is now outdated. The young people reading comics today are a hell of a lot more sophisticated than anyone has ever given them credit for being. In my opinion, Rocket is a character in her own right. Co-star would be much more accurate."

"People don't do teen sidekicks anymore," McDuffie declares. "Nobody wants to identify with the dopey kid in the book; everybody wants to identify with the hero. I don't know about you, but I didn't want to hang out with Batman. I wanted to *be* Batman. In the case of *Icon*, Rocket is the one who has created Batman, in a sense."

As for comparison to Superman, with whom Icon's origin bears passing similarities, McDuffie admits there are parallels between the two characters. "Superman is the seminal superhero myth," he observes, "and it's impossible to do something in this genre without dealing with the effect of Superman. We certainly intend for that to reflect on what we're doing here. I think Superman is a great story, and in the same way that Superman spoke to millions of immigrants who came to this country, we're hoping Icon will speak to millions of people who came here under less ideal circumstances."

The last of Milestone's new titles is *Static*, written by Robert L. Washington III and McDuffie, and drawn by John Paul Leon. Like early *Spider-Man*, *Static* looks at the problems of being a teen superhero, but with a newer, more realistic slant. "Static is a 15 year-old kid, who gains electromagnetic powers from the Big Bang—the same event that created the Blood Syndicate," says Dingle. "What he must do as he grows into manhood is to deal with the *responsibilities* of these powers. As Static, he can create this cool persona, but does it change him from being a geeky kid? He's still 15, he's still impressionable, and there will definitely be positive and negative forces tugging at him as he gets these powers.

"He's still treated the same in school. He's a very intelligent kid. I think a strain that goes through our characters is that they're intelligent, although they display this intelligence in different ways. When you look at the Blood Syndicate, each of them has to

*(continued on page 64)*

All Characters & Art Copyright 1993 Milestone Media Trademark DC Comics

Art Denys Cowan/Jimmy Palmiotti/Colors Janet Jackson

**"It will be interesting to see the interaction of these characters and their relationships," Dingle says of the Milestone Universe.**

# STRANGE

## Prelude

By FRANK GARCIA

***Marvel's Sorcerer Supreme once made TV movie magic.***

Dr. Strange (Peter Hooten) faced Morgan Le Fay (Jessica Walter) in the Sorcerer Supreme's first film (so far).

Art: Tom Wright

Oh, Eye of Agamotto, Baron Mordo, the Dread Dormammu, where were you?

When CBS aired *Dr. Strange* as a TV movie in 1978, it wasn't exactly the same Dr. Strange who had been casting spells in various Marvel Comics since Stan Lee and Steve Ditko created the famed sorcerer supreme back in 1963. Writer/director Philip DeGuere made liberal changes in Strange's backstory for the transition from the four-color page to the small screen.

An origin story, the filmed *Dr. Strange* told how Dr. Stephen Strange (Peter Hooten) confronted his destiny as the successor of Thomas Lindmer (Sir John Mills), Earth's supreme sorcerer. When Lindmer's old foe, Morgan Le Fay (Jessica Walter), crosses the dimensional barriers and threatens his tenure, Lindmer seeks out Dr. Strange. Wong (Clyde Kusatsu) finds him at a New York hospital's psychiatric department. Having weakened during the years on Earth, Lindmer must introduce Strange to his talents and convince him that he's desperately needed, before Le Fay succeeds in her plans to destroy the old man. A young university student, Clea (Eddie Benton), becomes Le Fay's pawn against Lindmer, and along the way, Strange falls for her. But Le Fay hasn't had the warmth of a man in her arms for centuries.

In the comics origin, Dr. Stephen Strange is a world-renowned, but arrogant, surgeon. After the loss of his surgical skills, he hits bottom, which leads to a search for the all-knowing, all-seeing Ancient One, who takes Strange under his wing and teaches him the mystical arts. Pitted against an enemy in Baron Mordo, a fellow apprentice whose true intentions against the Ancient One are revealed, Strange eventually earns the mantle as Earth's Sorcerer Supreme.

A veteran writer/director of such TV series as *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, *Simon & Simon* and CBS' *Twilight Zone* revival (which he discussed in STARLOG #99), DeGuere's foray into cosmic battles between good and evil

truly was a trip into a nightmare dimension.

"What I remember about *Dr. Strange* was the creative frustration," says DeGuere. "It was so intense that I doubted very seriously if there would *ever* come a time when I could watch that show. It didn't really come out the way I wanted it to."

In 1978, Universal Studios obtained a handful of Marvel Comics characters to adapt to television, but only three actually made it to the screen. Concerns about young viewers imitating *The Human Torch* had extinguished that idea, while the similarity to the already airing *The Man from Atlantis* deep-sixed the *Sub-Mariner*. *The Incredible Hulk* (with Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno) became a series while *Captain America* joined *Dr. Strange* in the TV movie arena. Universal had made a deal with CBS to do four two-hour TV movies pilots.

However, as DeGuere explains, "They offered these shows to CBS at a very low budget. As a consequence, when it came time to shoot *Dr. Strange*, I was, as the director, presented with a wildly unrealistic shooting schedule. The original schedule was something like 13 days. I was not terribly experienced as a director. I was inclined to rely on the studio, and if the studio says that the show should be made—or *could* be made—in a given time, then I felt it was my job to try and do that."

DeGuere felt that his previous experience of working out complicated schedules with producer Stephen Cannell on *Baa Baa Black Sheep* would help him conquer the production difficulties on this, his first TV movie as a writer/director.

"Right before I started shooting on *Dr. Strange*, *Star Wars* had hit and a couple of other big-budget fantasy/SF movies were in the works," explains DeGuere. "And the desire to put something on the screen, when it came to things like other dimensions and flying effects, was in direct conflict with the kind of shooting schedule we had been given. It was just simply *impossible* to do.

"There was an *endless* series of compromises that I was forced into. They weren't the kind of compromises that were well-thought-out in the first place, or that were designed to effectively bring across what the intent of the show's illusions were. The technology I was using to bring that show to the screen was woefully inadequate for the time and expectations we had. It was a very, very difficult thing to do. It was very frustrating—we went over schedule, and it became a hell I could not get out of. On the whole, it's a situation I wouldn't allow myself to get into again. I was young and naive, and kind of lost it."

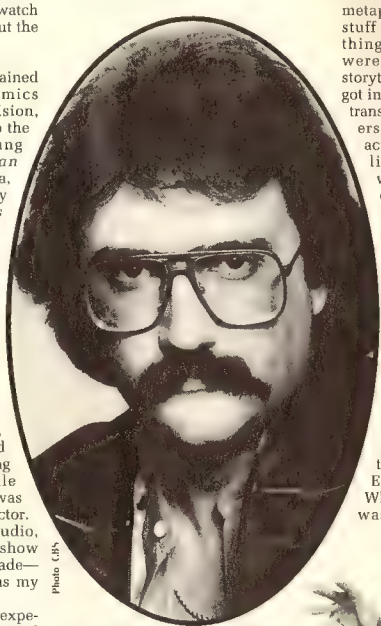


Photo CBS

**Today, Phil DeGuere looks back on his *Strange* experience with some bemusement.**

The situation forced DeGuere to make changes in virtually everything connected with *Dr. Strange*.

"It was just not a happy experience, and the show didn't come across with the kind of production values I had in mind," sighs DeGuere. "It follows that I went over-budget. It finally came down that we shot it in 20-21 days or so," the time period he had originally wanted. "It was a constant battle to try and get things accomplished in an unrealistic time frame."

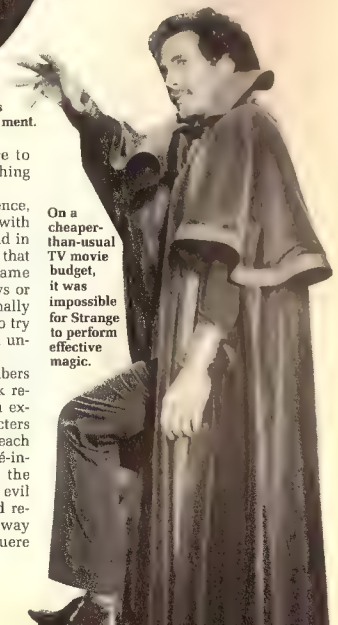
Other mistakes DeGuere remembers making was conceding to network requests that the script be heavy on exposition. Translation? The characters stood around explaining things to each other. Lindmer filled in his protégé-in-waiting on his "lenient" talents, the facts of the universe and ages-old evil demons. "That was a mistake and resulted in the whole thing being way too wordy. Way too much," DeGuere grimaces.

Adapting *Dr. Strange* for television was interesting and challenging because it was a field of fantasy filmmaking that hadn't really been explored.

"I've always been interested in metaphysical themes, occult fiction, stuff like that. I would say that the things that primarily attracted me were the metaphysical aspects of storytelling. It seemed to me, before I got into it, that it would be far easier to translate it to the screen than the others. It didn't require the kind of action-oriented superhero [antics] like *Captain America*, [which would have been] extraordinarily expensive to put on the screen."

DeGuere's original vision of bringing Dr. Strange to life "wasn't to try to faithfully re-create what you saw in the comic book pages. I was trying to take the theme and find a way to make it work on television.

"I had extensive discussions with Stan Lee about it at the time. The original origin story had a kind of hackneyed, tired quality to it in the '70s because of all of the emphasis it had in the '60s about Eastern gurus and Eastern mysticism in general. When Dr. Strange was created, he was a completely off-the-wall



**On a cheaper-than-usual TV movie budget, it was impossible for Strange to perform effective magic.**

All Dr. Strange TV Movie Art & Photos: Copyright 1978 Universal City Studios©1981 Layout & Design: Ron McLarnan

character. But by the time he got big and popular in the '60s, Dr. Strange was symbolic of a lot of empty-headed Eastern m[illegible]

DeGuere refers to the TV series *Kung Fu* as a template for the show's style. "I was trying to make it more contemporary and away from the comic per se, because I didn't feel it would come across well. Of all the movies that tried dealing with this kind of material, the one that made it most successfully was *Dragonslayer* [1981]. What I was looking for was a more fluid, hipper version of what was in the comics. I was looking for a dislocation in time and space. I've been many movies made since that [illegible] me say, 'Gee, I wish I'd had that quality.' And to a much larger extent, *Dragonslayer* got that quality largely because it was in the Middle Ages.

"The original idea at the very beginning of *Dr. Strange* was being progressively pushed out of normal, everyday sensory reality. What I was looking for was almost psychedelic. I really wanted a certain kind of magical glow to it in terms of what it looked like, and the general feeling that it had. It just didn't accomplish that."

And that's why the Eye of Agamotto and the Dread Dormammu are nowhere to be seen. "I didn't think those things would come across in the dialogue," DeGuere admits. "I didn't think they would play as effectively in my version as they did in the comic book medium. I have to admit, I didn't care much for the character of the dissolute and dissipated surgeon. I thought that was a somewhat unsympathetic character.

"And I was also literally flying into the unknown. I had never seen a show like this on television, nor had I any reference point from features or things like that to mark on. I really was out there in uncharted territory. I don't attribute the problems I had on making that show to the studio—everybody was very cooperative. Nevertheless, because of my experience, the project was *not* approached in an intelligent, sensible way. In fact, it wasn't until I worked with [director] Billy Friedkin on *Twilight Zone*, on 'Nightcrawlers,' that I really understood how essential it is that a movie be prepared properly before shooting."

Questioned for opinions of his cast, DeGuere sidesteps a direct critique by saying, "They did the best they could under the circumstances. Any problems that happened in the whole thing, I would have to lay the blame on the director [i.e. himself]. They were all completely willing and professional. There were no problems. There are scenes in this picture that I find nowhere near as believable as I hoped they would be. The overall feeling that runs throughout *Dr. Strange* really wasn't what I had in mind."

*Dr. Strange* never got close to being a TV series, despite its pilot status, primarily because of the network's slotting it in at 8 p.m. Tuesday night, opposite the smash Alex Haley mini-series *Roots*.

"It was a death period for CBS," says DeGuere. "In fact, it was the same time period for *Simon & Simon* two years later, and it was still a death period. It didn't have a lead-i[illegible]"

There seemed to be a general lack of interest from the network as well. "It was not something that CBS had much

***Dr. Strange* may fly again. Wes Craven will write and direct a new movie version.**

**According to DeGuere, the cast did "the best they could." The writer/director blames any problems on himself.**

enthusiasm for," says DeGuere.

Ideas for further *Strange* tales were in mind, as DeGuere suggested at the time in STARLOG #12. "In the second story, he will find himself more directly involved in a cosmic struggle for the fate of the Earth."

But today, "I'm sure there was discussion about that," attests DeGuere. "I can't remember if it was *really* done. If you sell a pilot, you know that you're immediately going into production and making a series. But if you put a movie on the air, you may not find out for quite a while whether you're going to series. It's a real necessity to have a blueprint in your mind or a thesis of what the successive stories would be like. I had some idea, but I don't recall that it was worked out very much."

**Sir John Mills took on the role of Thomas Lindmer, Strange's movie mentor, essentially the Ancient One in modern garb.**

Over the years, *Dr. Strange* has earned cult status with comics fans, especially since its MCA video release in 1987. "That's great news," DeGuere says. "It reinforces the fact that those who are involved in making the film often don't have a clear picture of what they're doing at the time, and after it's done, it isn't until a couple of years later that you can look back and get some kind of objectivity. Even today, whenever I watch anything I've done, I immediately plunge right back into whatever the process was at the time. I remember why this decision was made, or why that cut came out the way it did."

Dr. Strange has made his presence brighter in recent years. In the late '80s, filmmaker Bob (*Back to the Future*) Gale scripted a *Dr. Strange* movie that eventually wasn't made (STARLOG #110). Francis Ford Coppola's son, Roman, hoped to direct a separate *Dr. Strange* (CS #31) feature, but film rights instead recently went to the new Savoy Entertainment. Ironically, DeGuere's fellow compatriot from his *Twilight Zone* days, Wes Craven, will script and direct Savoy's *Strange* tale.

DeGuere, surprised at hearing this news, responds positively. He feels Craven did a good job on 1982's *Swamp Thing* and that Craven will achieve similar results with the sorcerer supreme.

If Philip DeGuere had to do it all over again, what would he do differently? "I would wait 10 years," he announces. "If I could do *Dr. Strange* in the mid-80s, I would have access to the technology that would make it possible to put it on the screen, without having to bend over backwards. The best [comics] adaptations are the ones that cost a lot of money and are on the big screen."

**DeGuere believes the whole film was "way too wordy."**

# LIFE WITH THE BATMAN

All Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1940, 1941, 1943, 1993 DC Comics Inc.

Photo: Laurie Bradach

***With Bob Kane & Bill Finger, Jerry Robinson fashioned the exploits of a dark knight.***

"It's gratifying that I did something that lives on," notes Robinson.

Art: Bob Kane/Jerry Robinson

## Part Two

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

The Joker was arguably the first classic comic-book villain, and creator Jerry Robinson agrees that Chester Gould's garish bad guys in *Dick Tracy* helped pave his way.

"I read *Dick Tracy* and Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*, and I can't say that there wasn't some of that influence on my thinking, although it wasn't conscious," says Robinson.

"You read things, and they circulate through your thinking. I wasn't a great comics fiend or buff at all then, because I wasn't thinking of comics as a career—I was into journalism. But I admired Milton Caniff. He also had great villains, not quite Dick Tracy's bizarre types. *Tracy* started in '31, and Gould was doing some of those villains before we introduced the Joker."

Another classic Batman foe, the Penguin, was created by Bill Finger, but Robinson also made some contributions to the character.

"I worked on the first Penguin story. As with all characters, when you do one for the first time, you find some of the visuals and the costume," says Robinson. "But I wouldn't say I created them in any way. I would assume that Bob did the first Penguin story, but I would have to see it. I know I did some early ones and an early Penguin cover, but I don't know which came first."

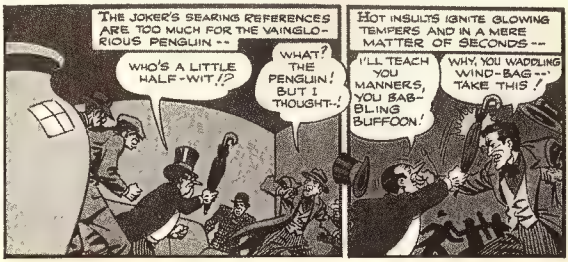
Presented with a DC *Batman Archives* volume containing the Penguin's introduction, Robinson confirms that he inked Bob Kane's pencils on the historic tale in *Detective* #58.

"I remember this story, and it's definitely Bob's pencils and my inks," he says. "When you ink a character for the first time, you develop him a little bit, but Bob did the initial concept."

One story of the Penguin's creation maintains that Bill Finger obtained his inspiration from the penguin symbol on a Kool cigarette pack.

"I don't remember that specifically," says Robinson. "I would

**"As with all the characters, when you do one for the first time, you find some of the visuals and the costume," Robinson says regarding the Penguin's creation.**


THE JOKER'S SEARING REFERENCES ARE TOO MUCH FOR THE VAINGLORIOUS PENGUIN --
WHO'S A LITTLE HALF-WIT!?
WHAT? THE PENGUIN! BUT I THOUGHT-!
HOT INSULTS IGNITE GLOWING TEMPERS AND IN A MERE MATTER OF SECONDS --
I'LL TEACH YOU MANNERS, YOU BABBLING BUFFOON!
WHY, YOU WADDLING WIND-BAG --! TAKE THIS!

Art: Jerry Robinson/George Roussos

have to think back. But it certainly was Bill's idea. He created *all* the other characters."

The following issue, *Detective* #59, also featured a Penguin story, which Robinson attributes to Kane. He is uncertain as to who drew the cover to #60, but identifies the next one as a Kane-Robinson collaboration.

"I loved to work on the Joker stories, because I felt a closeness to the character," he explains, but adds that he never wrote any Batman stories after he lost the opportunity to write the Joker's introduction in *Batman* #1 (see CS #35). "I began to think about writing my own things and just draw the Batman, which I did. If I had another idea for a character, I would have contributed, but creatively, I was thinking of other things and just drawing for *Batman*."

Robinson notes that the cover of *Detective* #62 is the only cover from his collection that he ever got rid of. "I traded it to an art collector for a Marcel Duchamp," he says. "A collector came to me and offered me fantastic amounts of money for a cover. One time, he gave me a blank check, which I didn't even want to think about!

"Finally, he said, 'If I can't buy something, how about a trade? Name an artist you like.' By chance, there happened to be a Duchamp retrospective museum show, and I admired him. So, I said, 'Marcel Duchamp,' and he said, 'I just bought a whole collection—come to my apartment and we'll dig out something you like.'

"I thought he wasn't for real, but I took along an appraiser to his Park Avenue apartment. This apartment was loaded with every kind of fine art—it was *incredible*. The appraiser looked around, gave me the high sign that it was all OK. I picked out some Duchamp, and we settled on this one [cover, #62].

"For some reason, of the ones I have, this is one that I liked the least," the artist admits. "But it's one of the first Joker covers, and probably much more valuable than others. These were all photostats of the Joker's head," he points to the balloons. "I thought the cover was less important, because I just drew one of them, and those were all statted. Anyway, that's the only piece of Batman art I had that I ever parted with, and I have this Duchamp, which I never would have aspired to own. I was intrigued that I was trading Batman for Duchamp!"

Robinson points out another rarity—the cover to *Detective* #65, where Batman and Robin welcome the Boy Commandos to the title. The piece combined Fred Wray's pencils and Robinson's inks with Joe Simon and Jack Kirby art on the Boy Commandos figures. As it catches his eye, Robinson also notes that he did the very first Two-Face cover, which appeared on *Detective* #68. Unfortunately, he says original art was seldom returned in those comics' early years. "The only art we got back in those days was the stuff we asked for from the printers."

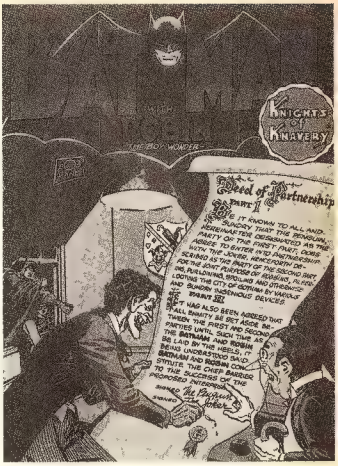
The artist also made another contribution to Batman that has been forgotten for many decades, and he announces it as an afterthought while paging through the *Batman Archives*.

"I don't think I've ever mentioned this before. I was the one who redesigned this logo," he reveals, pointing to the logo with Batman's head over the body of a cartoon bat, the classic logo that was used in the comic for decades (and first appeared in the June 1940 *Detective Comics* #40 and *Batman* #1, also released in spring 1940). "That's my lettering—I was lettering at the time," he points out. "I don't remember how I came up with it. I just remember we wanted to redesign the old one, because it looked corny.

"Using the bat head was obvious. This lettering is very incorrect. The calligraphy is wrong, the thick and thin, but I knew nothing about it. I wanted a certain look to it. That's how we did it—we did it how we liked things to look, rather than the correct way. With Robin, I gave him the old English style of lettering, more like Robin Hood—that was the idea."

When he became tired of drawing *Batman* in 1945-46, Robinson decided to quit. "I had many offers to do other comics," he explains. "I did a lot of freelance things. I had brought Mort Meskin up to DC, and we had formed a partnership. He had created the Vigilante and Johnny Quick, and we did them together for a number of years after we formed a studio together. Then, we did the Black Terror and the Fighting Yank. By that time, Simon and Kirby had their own outfit, and we did some

Art: Jerry Robinson/George Roussos

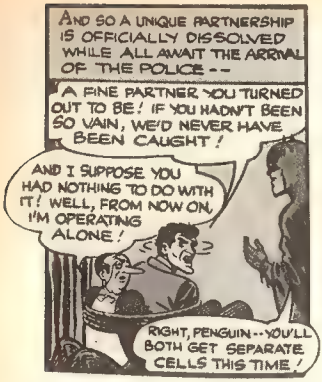



**He may have helped create many faces in Batman's rogues' gallery, but Robinson feels closest to the Joker.**

**Robinson left comics and went into book illustrating, where his comics experience helped greatly.**

Art: Bob Kane/Jerry Robinson

Art Jerry Robinson/George Roussos


AND SO A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP IS OFFICIALLY DISSOLVED WHILE ALL AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF THE POLICE --
A FINE PARTNER YOU TURNED OUT TO BE! IF YOU HADN'T BEEN SO VAIN, WE'D NEVER HAVE BEEN CAUGHT!
AND I SUPPOSE YOU HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT! WELL, FROM NOW ON, I'M OPERATING ALONE!
RIGHT, PENGUIN -- YOU'LL BOTH GET SEPARATE CELLS THIS TIME!

**After losing the opportunity to write Joker's introduction, "I began to think about writing my own things and just draw Batman, which I did."**

work for them as well.

"In 1959-60, I started teaching at the School of Visual Arts at night, while I did my own work during the day," he continues. "Steve Ditko was a student of mine—he had never studied before. I got him a scholarship his second year. I had many students who went on and became very well-known in comics. As soon as somebody showed enough talent in class, I would call a publisher. One year, my students earned a total of $27,000 while they were in class! I wanted to get them working as soon as possible.

"At that time, Burne Hogarth, the school's co-founder, and I became friends. Will Eisner was also a close friend at that time. I met Stan Lee in the '50s, and I worked with him during the '60s, doing all sorts of things just before the Marvel superhero era—Westerns, crime, war, romance.

"I also worked for Western doing *Bat Masterson* and *Lassie*—bread-and-butter things," he says, claiming that he came to hate drawing *Lassie* so much that he began to search for ways *not* to draw the collie. During one chase sequence through a field, Robinson made the grass so tall that he showed only the dog's tail sticking up through the rushes.

"Basically, I left comics after that, and got into book illustration. I did maybe 30 books of all kinds. My experience in comics was really great—it enabled me to draw about anything I could think of, which most book publishers weren't used to. They liked to have you specialize—if they had a book about cars, they would have the 'car artist' do that. They weren't used to my going from one thing to another. I did science books, biographies, histories and some advertising art during that period."

Robinson went on to work in newspaper cartooning, however. "For a couple of years, I did a newspaper strip, *Jet Scott*, but my goal was to become a political cartoonist. I was a political animal—my family was involved in politics at a local level, and I grew up in that atmosphere. I came up with the idea for a political cartoon that would be good for editorial pages called *Still Life*: Inanimate objects would comment on the news. In those days, we didn't have op-ed pages—just editorial pages—so my cartoon had to appear on the same page as that newspaper's editorial cartoon.

# LIFE WITH THE BATMAN

YOU'VE SLOWED ME UP, BUT YOU HAVEN'T BROUGHT ME DOWN! AND WHEN WE DO LAND -- THERE'LL BE A NICE SURPRISE FOR YOU -- IF THE WIND STAYS RIGHT!
I DON'T LIKE THE WAY HE SAYS THAT!
WELL, THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO ABOUT IT NOW! WE CAN'T LET GO!
ON A HIGHWAY SEVERAL MILES AWAY -- THE PENGUIN'S JOCUND PARTNER --
HERE HE COMES NOW! WHA--? HE HAS BATMAN AND ROBIN WITH HIM! GET THE NET READY, BOYS -- AND PREPARE FOR ACTION!
WE'RE ALL SET!

**"If we had the advances that are taking place now," Robinson says, "I might not have left comics."**

Art Jerry Robinson/George Roussos

"I created the idea of inanimate objects, so it would look as different as possible from a standard editorial cartoon, but still comment on the political scene," he says. "*Still Life* became very successful, and I did it for about 15 years. I changed the name to *Life With Robinson*, and I still do three a week.

"In 1978, I founded the Cartoonists and Writers Syndicate. I've been president of the Syndicate and editorial director, and we now represent more than 200 leading cartoonists and writers in 45 countries around the world. We syndicate their work to U.S. papers and abroad. That has been one of my most satisfying accomplishments.

"I traveled around the world and met the artists. Americans are often too traditional in their work, so I wanted to bring some of the best foreign cartoonists to America. I had to invent a format in which to do it, because ordinarily, papers wouldn't print cartoons from abroad. I invented a format called 'News of the World,' in

Art: Bob Kane/Jerry Robinson

**Batman's transformation over the years makes Robinson note that "we lost some of the drama and mystery."**

which a paper could show what world opinion was and all the different philosophies, and it has expanded every year. We have another exciting feature called 'Wit of the World,' and the leading humor cartoonists contribute to that—*New Yorker* cartoonists, *Punch* from England, *Krokodil* in Moscow."

Jerry Robinson has been more successful than many early comics artists and writers in establishing himself outside the industry, but admits that he sometimes misses the old days.

"It's fun to go to conventions and reminisce, but if we had had the advances that are taking place now, I might not have left comics," he says. "We didn't own our characters. We didn't really think of comics as a long career. There's some remarkable talent working in comics today. It's very exciting, and I admire their work."

Robinson says he was too busy to see *Batman Returns*, but he did catch the first movie. "I liked some things and I disliked a few things," he admits. "I didn't like the script. I liked the portrayal by Jack Nicholson, but I didn't like the concept as they wrote it—to me, he came out as a mad terrorist. I don't mind changing a character if it does something storywise or if it helps, but I don't think it helped. I think it diminished the character.

"But, it was such a glitzy production—the sets were exciting and some things were good, but overall, I was disappointed. I think they needlessly introduced all the other characters. I mean, the Joker is strong enough—they could have written a much better, intriguing story with just him. My main criticism was the script. I wish Bill Finger was around to write the script—oh, it would have been great! He would have given his eyeteeth to write the *Batman* movie. I feel terrible that he didn't live to see this and get credit for it. Unfortunately, he didn't get *any* credit until after he died—I appreciate what they're saying now, but the main credit *should* have gone to Bill."

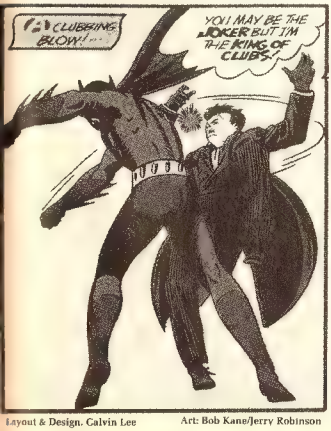
The comic-book Batman has gone through many stages in his development over the decades, but Robinson says he hasn't really paid much attention to it all. "I would just see it now and then," he explains. "I would be very impressed with the artwork, but I didn't read it. The artwork remained too close to the realism school. We lost some of the drama and mystery of Batman. We never tried to show every last muscle correctly if it interfered with the story. These artists are brilliant—they're *better* artists than we were—but I think their art works better on other characters than on Batman.

"The versions I liked best were by Frank Miller [on *The Dark Knight Returns*], and David Mazzuchelli [on *Batman: Year One*]. When I first started to read it [*Batman: Year One*], they had Bruce Wayne walking through Robinson Park. I didn't think anything of it, but then, he passes by Finger Memorial, and that's when I thought, 'Hey, wait a minute.' I thought it was very nice of Frank Miller, whom I never met. They put that in at the beginning, and after I read the story, I saw the first page, where they said it was an homage to Bob, Bill and myself. I learned later that DC wasn't happy giving us any credit due to possible legal problems, but Frank had insisted on it. I thought it was very nice of him."

Despite his many other achievements, Jerry Robinson agrees that the shadow of the bat looms the largest.

"It's strange in some ways. It's gratifying that I did something that lives on, but it's like looking back at one's youth," the artist says. "To look back at some episode of your life and see it being resurrected is strange, but I find it gratifying. I guess I have as big an ego as anybody else, and it's nice to be remembered."

**The *Batman* film looked good to Robinson but "they could have written a much better, intriguing story with just the Joker."**




Layout & Design, Calvin Lee

Art: Bob Kane/Jerry Robinson

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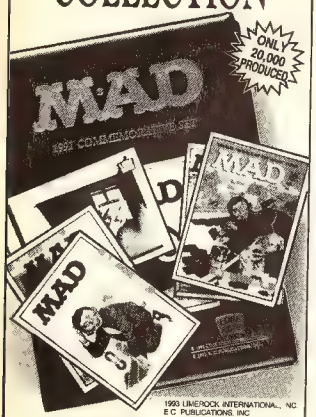


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# Ultraverse

*(continued from page 35)*

working from designs by Marat Mychaels.

Gerber also writes *Sludge*, a man-into-monster title set to premiere in October. When corrupt cop Frank Hoag refuses to kill another officer, he's gunned down by the mob and left for dead in the sewers. But experimental chemicals in the muck transform Hoag's barely-alive body into a towering mass of inhuman rage. Kevin Nowlan designed the character and Aaron Lopresti pencils this monthly.

In *Firearm*, James Robinson, writer of Dark Horse's *Terminator: Endgame*, explores the role of a normal man in an Ultranormal world. Alexander Swan has been a soldier in the Special Boat Service and an agent for a top-secret English Intelligence agency. Now, he's a private investigator facing supernatural entities and super-powered villains, armed only with a little courage and a big gun. Jerry Bingham designed the character. *Firearm* debuts in September.

The writers seem uniformly enthusiastic about their role in the Malibu *Ultraverse*, but perhaps Englehart sums up their feelings best. "There was a time when writers made a big difference in the sales of books. Art, art, art is the big deal now. But lately people have been coming up to me in comics stores and saying, 'You know, there are no more stories at Marvel any more.' My feeling is that people would like to start relating to characters again, to know the people and not just look at their costumes.

"This just feels like the early Marvel to me," says Englehart. "We're creating something that's fun *and* coherent."

Malibu is intent upon spreading the word about the *Ultraverse* to the four corners of comicdom. The company has done extensive advertising. For retailers, they produced a promotional video featuring interviews with all the *Ultraverse* creators, as well as a live-action *Hardcase* short subject, scripted by Hudnall and starring martial artist Gary (*City Hunter*) Daniels.

Malibu's film division is working to bring other *Ultraverse* characters to the silver screen. A videogame based on *Prime* is being readied, and other software is in the works. There will be a set of *Ultraverse* trading cards, too.

When introducing new titles and characters, some comics publishers rely on flashy gimmicks like holograms, polybags and multiple covers to generate sales among collectors. Ulm, however, doesn't see the need for such excess. "Right now," he says, "many companies are trying to get that speculative dollar. But I don't want to depend on that. It'll be nice if some people want to buy 50 copies of *Mantra*, but I'm more interested in getting that *one* person who really wants to buy the book every month."

Perhaps the most unusual adjunct to the new books will be *Ultra Magazine*, which Ulm describes as "an artifact from the *Ultraverse*. We've established that super-beings are considered celebrities. So, *Ultra* is a cross between *People* magazine and the *National Enquirer*." Readers seeking more information about their favorite characters can browse through *Ultra* to find the latest dirt. Of course, there's no guarantee that *Ultra*, edited by Paul O'Connor, will report the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Ulm insists that *Ultra* is far more than some kind of Malibu house organ. "The magazine is going to be a really exciting approach," he says, "a real chance for fans to get involved with this fictional universe."

The possibility of interesting crossovers seems vital for any flourishing comics universe. Ulm asserts that there's plenty of room for them in the *Ultraverse*. "The crossovers will start happening soon, but they're going to be meaningful, story-driven, not just an excuse to put the most popular character in every title to sell more copies."

Trying to pin Ulm down on the precise nature of those proposed crossovers proves nearly futile. "Basically, *anything* can happen in the *Ultraverse*," is all he'll say. "It's a wide-open field. There's an enormous surprise coming in December that no one has a hint about yet."

Ulm seems confident that the Malibu *Ultraverse* can hold its own in an increasingly competitive market. "We're upping the ante in a couple of ways," he says. "First, in the amount of promotion we're doing. Second, in the level of service we're giving to the individual creators. My motto is that the creator always comes first. We're pointing that out in all our actions."

He continues, "Each of our writers can tell difficult stories and make it look easy. These books are action-packed, but they have an aura of sophistication that doesn't bounce you out of the book. It's not like we're trying to write these for a select group of people. They're for *all* comics fans.

"I think the books themselves are going to set a new standard for storytelling. These are some of the finest comics I've ever read."

That's a big promise to live up to, but Chris Ulm and company seem undaunted. "We have to provide quality to the consumer," he says. "All the hype, all the promotion, none of that means anything unless you have a product people *want* to read."

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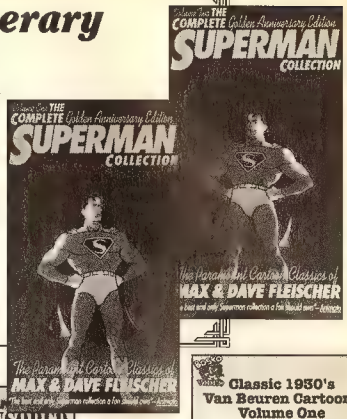


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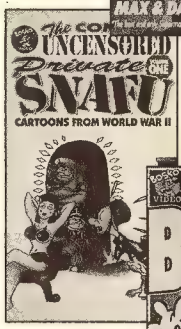

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# Shooter

*(continued from page 40)*

there ever since, and now that it's starting to crumble, and DC—I've never been able to figure out what they're doing—they're so powerful, and they have such good characters that they're always going to hang in there at 10 or 15 percent of the market. If Marvel falls to 20 percent—which is possible very quickly—and if DC is in that 10-15 percent range, that leaves 65 percent of the market up for grabs among the companies now trying to launch lines to compete with Marvel and DC. Of the companies that are trying to do that—there's Dark Horse, Malibu, Image, Valiant and us. There's plenty of room for a whole lot of good new books. There's *no* room for bad books, there are already way too many of those.

"I've had people say, 'How do you think you'll be able to compete with Dark Horse, Malibu and these other guys?' My question is, 'How do they think they'll be able to compete with *me*?' I guess it's fair to point out that every one of those companies came to me to ask me to do it for them. And then when I wouldn't, they're going to try it anyway. It seems to me that that's a strong vote in our favor: Not only do *I* think I can do it, *they* think I can do it. By the way, I got to know many of those people pretty well, and got to like them a lot, and I'm very glad there's room in the marketplace because I hope they *all* win.

"Valiant went a long way to turn some things around. People are not now dismissing new companies the way they were. Now if it doesn't say Marvel on it, they say, 'Oh goody.' I think we have a receptive audience. The way I look at it is this: All we have to do is be good and we'll win. When I started Valiant, you had to be good, you had to get people to notice, you had to survive, you had to get artists to work for you. There were many things you had to do, now you only have to be good cause we're on center stage in the Twilight Zone."

Shooter kind of laughs when he discusses the fans, but it's a friendly laugh. "The fans are fans, the retailers are fans, the distributors are fans, the editors are fans, the creative people are fans. *Everybody* is a fan. This is the most collaborative medium on Earth. Go see a movie—if you don't like it, go ahead, write Steven Spielberg a letter, he'll *never* read it.

"But if you read *Sin City* and you have something you want to say to Frank Miller, just drop by the San Diego Con, there he is. You say, 'Hey, Frank, you screwed this up' and the thing is, we all influence each other, we really do," he says enthusiastically. "No creator, no matter how proud and puffy and arrogant he might be, goes to those conventions and walks away without some of his ideas changed. Everybody is in this together."

The comics industry has changed drastically in recent years, with artists coming to the fore and writers questioning their place. Shooter, however, doesn't see where there's a problem. "I don't think you can take them apart," he says of the writing and artwork. "They are seamless. If everybody was a Moebius or a Frank Miller, you wouldn't have artists and writers, you would have cartoonists. The problem often arises that there's no creative leadership at the top.

"I really think that art and writing are part of the whole visual/verbal language of comics. As an editor, as a presumably capable creative leader, it's my job to get these people to work together and come out with an entertainment experience that people will like. You can't say the art is more important or the writing is more important—if it isn't all there, it's garbage or wallpaper or something, but it's *not* a good comic.

"What has happened is that with the lack of leadership, whoever has the most clout here or there starts getting away with murder," he continues. "I think it's a great crime that Chris Claremont, who did *X-Men* for 17 years, got squeezed off of *X-Men*. That's a pretty bad situation. If you do it right, you can create a really great team and produce great stories. It requires getting the right people. There are people like Frank Miller who are soloists, but there are also people like Mike Barr, Chris Claremont, Roger Stern, David Lapham, people who like working in a universe environment. Guys like Roger Stern and Steve Ditko help you with continuity, and then spring board off the stuff you've done and give you stuff to spring board off. And you have the kind of wonderful continuity that Marvel had in the old days. The truth is finding football players instead of golfers. That's one part of it, another part is creative leadership so that you can really get the people together, get them to talk.

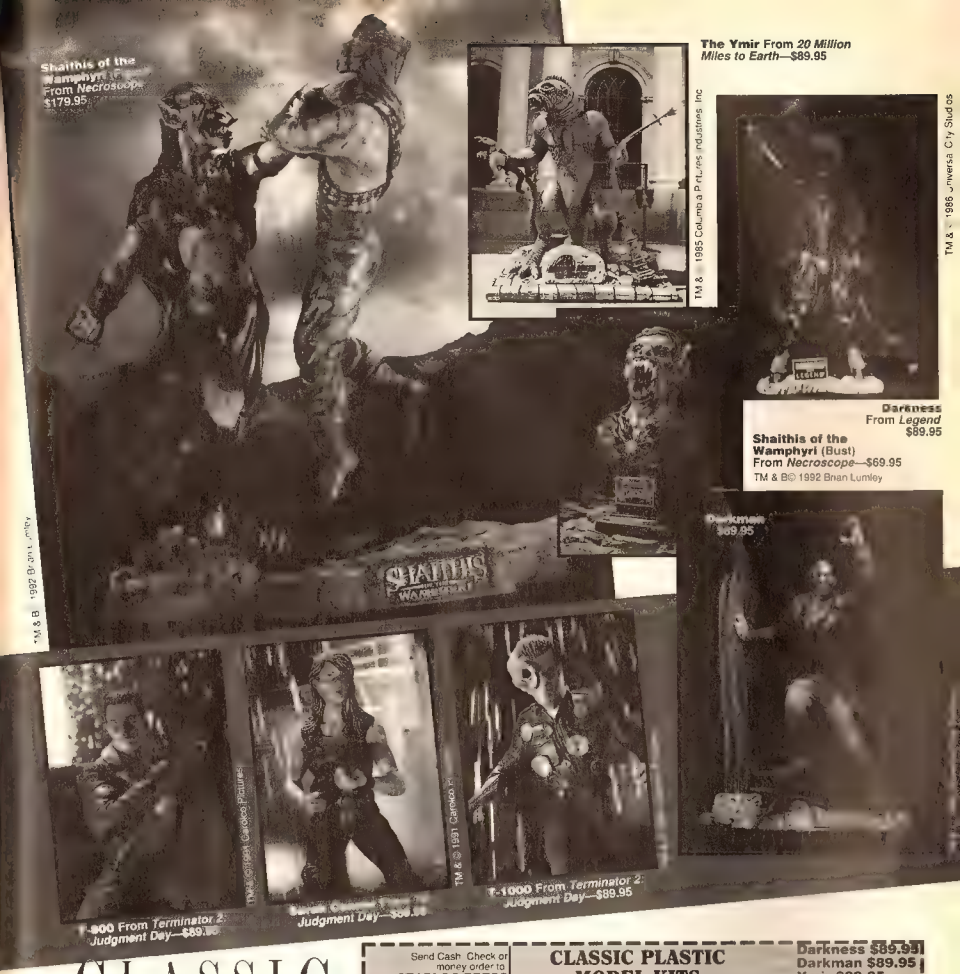
"And the other important thing—and this is something many fans don't know or understand—is to play fair. When I started at Marvel in 1976, it was *all* work for hire, it was all 32 pages of pulp paper, printed letter press, flat rate, Marvel owned it all, period. If you didn't like it, leave; and the rates stunk. One of my conditions for taking the job—and I told the president of the company this—I wanted to change the entire way we do business, 'I want to pay royalties' and he said, 'You mean we don't?' He was from book publishing, and he was stunned that we didn't pay royalties. I thought, 'This is going to be easy.'

"I got about halfway done," Shooter declares, "and then Marvel started being bought and sold, and no one wanted to hear about our future as a company. They wanted to know what the bottom line was, and they hit a brick wall.

"Many creators are bitter and upset, and break off and form Image, or go to Dark Horse and become Frank Miller. It would be great if there was something like Marvel, where you could play on the team and have a great deal of fun. There should be something between Marvel 'engulf and devour' and Image, and pretend it's a universe but it's not or be Frank Miller and do your own little thing.

"So, what if you did an enlightened company," Shooter smiles, "that was creator-friendly, a terrific deal, and where guys could make a lot of money and have a carried interest in everything they create for the rest of their lives. So you make this great opportunity for them. You have the good parts of Marvel, the good parts of winging it on your own, and you create an environment where people *want* to be storytellers. It's not 'Give me a flashy artist, let's go for the quick buck, can we have a hologram on the cover?'

"It's an environment where people are thinking long term, thinking creatively, thinking about the important things instead of 'how am I going to squeeze another 100 grand out of the direct market this year?' Because if they're doing their jobs right, they'll get plenty of money, and put the emphasis where it ought to be. And that's what I want with Defiant," Jim Shooter says, "to be the *next* Marvel, but I don't want to make the mistakes. I want to do it right, and that's the important thing to me, to do it well and not have any of the down sides. You don't have to have the down sides."

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# Milestone

*(continued from page 51)*

be intelligent in order to survive. The same is true of Augustus Freeman and Raquel Ervin in *Icon*, of Curtis Metcalf in *Hardware* and it's definitely true of Virgil Hawkins in *Static*."

Due to its subject matter, *Static* will have the lightest tone of the four Milestone titles. "It's still going to be dark and gritty!" jokes Cowan. "Actually, it's by far our funniest book. There's a lot of humor and wit."

"Although I co-wrote the opening story arc, the book will be very much Robert Washington's," McDuffie hastens to add. "It's an enormous amount of fun, and I think it's the most realistic depiction of high school life that I've ever seen in comics. In fact, one of the things Robert does that's so wonderful is, when you read the book, you'll flash back and remember how you felt when you were that age."

"The other thing we should point out," says Cowan, "is that we have excellent artists on our books. We have Mark Bright on *Icon* doing the best work of his career so far. The new artist on *Static* is a guy named John Paul Leon, who's an incredible kid, just amazing. The difference in growth between *Static* #1 and #6, which he's working on now, is remarkable. Chriscross, the new artist on *Blood Syndicate*, is another incredible find. He starts with issue #4."

Because of their distribution deal with DC, the Milestone creators are able to create the kind of books they want to publish, free of outside interference. "This is *totally* a Milestone production," says Dingle, who helped devise the deal with DC. "We sat down with them to talk about marketing strategies early on, but our relationship is that they handle the distribution, make sure the books get the coverage in the catalogs and that we're part of their solicitation material. Beyond that, there's no involvement from DC.

"What you see in our books comes from Dwayne's computer, Denys' easel and from our imaginations. Anybody who has read our books knows they're not DC books, and they're not Marvel books. They have a tone and feel that is distinctly *ours*."

For those fans who may be waiting for an eventual DC/Milestone crossover, Dingle warns that such a meeting may not be in the cards. "What's going to happen is we're going to focus on our characters, and have them crossover," he explains. "At this point, there are no plans to co-mingle the Milestone and DC universes.

"I never say never, but I *do* know what you could do to put a DC character into our universe. It's a different feel, a different story structure, a different audience. Before we can do something as revolutionary as a crossover, it's important to focus on our characters, have them stand on their own two feet, and have people identify with them and what they're all about.

"Right now," Dingle continues, "there are still many questions that need to be answered in the Milestone books. What does Hardware do after resolving his situation with Alva? In *Blood Syndicate*, how are they going to get along together? What's going to happen with Holocaust leaving the group? Are Icon and Rocket going to be able to gel as a team? Can Static handle the responsibilities of his powers? These stories take time to tell. The characters take a while to evolve, and then it will be interesting to see the interaction of these characters and their relationships."

"There's a lot going on in the books' background the first year," says McDuffie. "You'll see bits and pieces in every book, and you've already seen some very important things happening in the background of *Hardware*, even though no one could possibly know that yet. It's a universe, and actions that occur in one book will affect the others. If you read all four, it's a much richer experience, and there are things you could only pick up from having read the books in combination."

Inevitably, the discussion turns to the subject of white characters in the Milestone Universe. With the company's current emphasis on black and minority characters, will whites be included in their cultural mix? "What we're trying to do, and this is not an evasive answer," responds Dingle, "is to develop a range of characters, both heroes and villains, of all different races and genders. I think another area that hasn't been explored is female characters, or characters of ethnicity. There are some characters that are recognizably Italian, but there's little ethnicity in comic books, or a celebration of the multi-culturalism of this country. That's one of America's strengths, and I want to introduce those characters as well, so you'll be seeing white heroes as part of Dakota, just as you'll be seeing white villains, as well as blacks, Latinos and Asians."

"In 50 years of comics, that's a lot of white characters!" declares Cowan. "That's cool, but there's a lot of catching up to do, *and* a lot of room to grow. Conceivably, there will be white heroes as a natural progression, but right now, what we're concentrating on are our first four books, which are very important to us."

Derek Dingle sums up the philosophy of the Milestone creators in this way: "One of the things we decided to do when we created the Dakota Universe, was to make an environment that wasn't all just black heroes fighting black villains; we all thought it was important to have this interracial interaction. Curtis Metcalf can be leaving his company, and Augustus Freeman can leave his law firm feeling good after winning a case, and walk outside, and he still can't get a cab. Those are the nuances we want to show in society. Heroism is a momentary thing." CS

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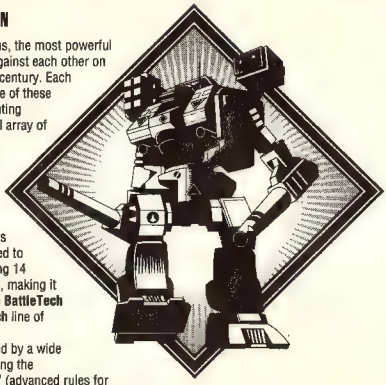

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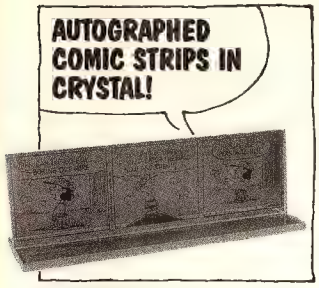


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# COMICS REPORTER

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**Addams Family.** Sequel. PP. Out fall. AN series. ABC. HB.

**The Airtight Garage.** AN.

**Alias.** Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

**ALIENS vs. Predator.** Film. DH/Fox.

❑ **Animaniacs.** AN. Fox. WB/Am. Fall.

**Annie.** Film. Rastar.

**Archie.** LA Film. DIC.

**Barbarella.** LA film. Nel.

❑ **Batman.** AN series. AN film spin-off for X-mas theatrical release.

**Betty Boop.** AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck. MGM.

**The Black Cat.** Film.

**Black Panther.** Film. W/Wesley Snipes. Sony.

**Blade.** Film.

**Blankman.** Film. C: Damon Wayans, Eric Gold. Sony.

**Blondie.** Film. WB.

**Bonkers D. Bobcat.** Syn AN series. WD. Fall '93.

❑ **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs.** AN series. Nel. CBS. Fall.

**Casper.** Film. Am. U.

❑ **Conan.** 52 more AN TV episodes.

**Concrete.** Film. DH

❑ **The Crow.** Film. In limbo due to Brandon Lee's death.

**Crusader Rabbit.** AN TV.

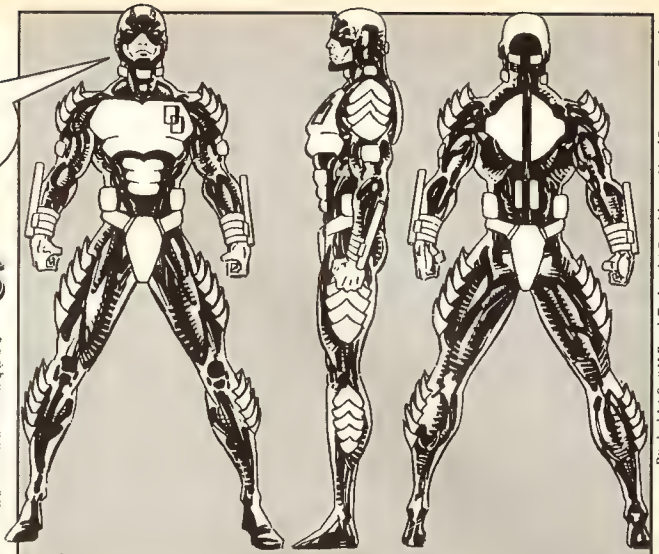
**Cyberpunk.** Film. S: Steve Roberts. D: Rene Manzor.

**Deadworld.** Film. S: Mark Pavia (D), Jack O'Donnell (P).

**Dennis the Menace.** Out.

**Dinosaurs for Hire.** AN series. Fox.

**Dr. Strange.** Film. S/D: Wes Craven. Savoy Ent.



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**Tired of the brawls, Daredevil adopts a brand-new costume for now—courtesy artist Scott McDaniels and writer Dan Chichester. But, will he ever get back to television?**

**Doom's IV.** Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

**Dudley Do-Right.** Film. U.

**Elektra Assassin.** Film

**Exosquad.** AN TV series. U. W/ Robby Benson. Fall bow.

❑ **Family Dog.** AN specials. Airing on CBS this summer.

**Fantastic Four.** Film.

**Faust.** Film. S: Stuart Gordon.

**Flaming Carrot.** Film.

**The Flintstones.** Film. Fred: John Goodman. Barney: Rick Moranis. Wilma: Elizabeth Perkins. Betty: Rosie O'Donnell. U/Am. D: Brian Levant. S: Jim Jennewein, Tom Parker, Gary Ross. P. Bruce Cohen, Colin Wilson. Lensing. AN TV special. ABC. Fall.

**G.I. Joe.** Film. S/D: Sheldon Lettich. WB.

**The Green Falcon.** TV. Am.

**The Green Hornet.** Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer. U.

**Incredible Hulk.** Film. U.

**Iron Man.** Film.

**Judge Dredd.** Film.

**Kull.** Film. U. S: C. Pogue.

**The Lion King.** AN film. WD. Nov. '94.

**Lone Wolf & Cub.** Film. D: John Bruno. S: Bill Wisher.

**Mai the Psychic Girl.** Film.

❑ **The Mantis.** Fox TV. U. EP: Sam Raimi, Sam Hamm.

**The Mask.** Film. New Line. S/D: Chuck Russell.

**The Men in Black.** Film. Col. P: W. Parkes, L. McDonald.

**Mr. Magoo.** Film. Am/WB.

❑ **Model by Day.** TV movie. Fox. W/ Famke Janssen. S/P: J. Loeb II, M. Weisman. D: Christian Duguay.

**Pagemaster.** AN/LA film. Fox/HB. 1994 release.

❑ **Peanuts.** Paramount Home Video has acquired rights & will re-issue all specials & movies on video. LA film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.

**The Phantom.** Film. PP.

**Plastic Man.** Film. WB/Am. S: L. Wilson. D: B. Spicer.

**Pocahontas.** AN film. WD. Spring '94.

**Prince Valiant.** AN series. Family Chan. LA film. S: M. Beckner. N. Constantin Film.

**Red Sonja.** TV. Lancit.

**Reid Fleming.** Film. S: creator David Boswell. P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II.

**Richie Rich.** Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis. S: Jim Jennewein & Tom Parker doing rewrite.

**RoboCop 3.** Out soon.

**The Saint.** Film. P: Robert Evans. S: Jeff Boam. PP.

**Sandman.** Film.

❑ **Sgt. Rock.** Film. P: Joel Silver, Bob Zemeckis. S: John Milius. WB.

**The Shadow.** Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. D: Russell Mulcahy. W/ Alec Baldwin. Films July.

❑ **Sheena.** TV series. P: Paul Aratow. Col

**Speed Racer.** AN TV series. Fred Wolf Films. Fall '93 bow. Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson. S: John Lawton. WB.

❑ **Spider-Man.** AN TV mini-series. Fox. Regular daily AN TV series to follow in fall '94. Film. S: Jim Cameron (D), Neil Ruttenberg. Summer '95.

**Starwatcher.** AN film. PP.

❑ **Superman.** TV series. ABC. Superman: Dean Cain. Lois: Teri Hatcher.

❑ **Tales from the Crypt-Keeper.** AN TV series. Nel. ABC. Fall

**Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.** AN series. CBS, Syn.

**Terry & the Pirates.** TV.

❑ **The Tick.** AN. TV mini-series. Fox. Sunbow.

**Time Cop.** Film. D: Sam Raimi. DH/L.

**Tom & Jerry.** AN film. Out this summer.

**Trouble with Girls.** Film. Fox/FF. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones.

**We're Back.** AN film. Am/U. Fall '93.

**Wizard of Id.** Film. Cinergi.

**Wolff & Byrd.** TV. Lorimar. P: Joel Simon, Bill Todman Jr. EP/D: Joe Dante. Fox.

❑ **Wonder Woman.** AN TV.

**Zen.** Film. AN series. RS.

❑ **Zorro.** Film. S: J. Randal Johnson, Joel Gross. TriStar. LA TV series. F. Chan. AN TV series. Nel.

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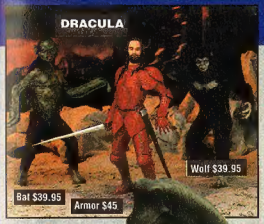

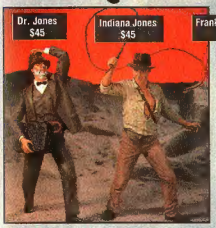

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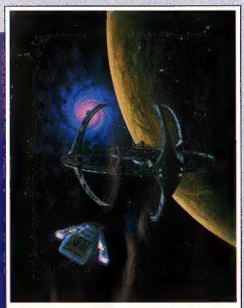

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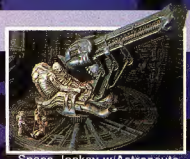
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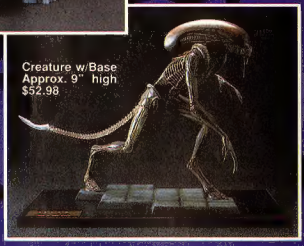
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| Batman Venom Trade | $10/ 7.95 |
| Cable Trade (Liefield art) | $17/14.95 |
| Daredevil & Black Widow | $15/12.95 |
| Death of Superman Trade | $5/ 3.95 |
| Ghost Rider (Issues 1-7) | $13/10.95 |
| Infinity Gauntlet Trade | $25/19.95 |
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| Sandman: Game of Chance | $20/16.95 |
| Spiderman Alien Costume | $13/10.95 |
| Spidey Trade (Issues 1-5) | $13/10.95 |
| Spiderman vs. Venom | $13/10.95 |
| Superman: Man of Steel | 7.50/ 5.95 |
| Superman: Funeral Trade | 7.50/ 5.95 |
| Venom Deathtrap Trade | $7/ 5.95 |
| X-Men Dark Phoenix Saga | $13/10.95 |
| X-Men From the Ashes | $17/14.95 |
| X-Men Masterworks Vol 1 | $13/ 9.95 |
| X-Men X-Tinction Agenda | $25/19.95 |

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| Aliens vs. Predator II #1 | 2.50/1.95 |
| New! Written by Chris Claremont! Hot! | |
| Dark Horse Comics 11,12 | 2.50/1.95 |
| Eudaemon 1,2 (New!) | 2.50/1.95 |
| Grendel: Devils & Hell 1 | 2.95/2.50 |
| James Bond Armageddon 3 | $3/2.50 |
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| Golden Age 1,2 (Deluxe) | 4.95/3.95 |
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| Lobo visits a comic convention! | |
| Phantom Stranger 1(Vertigo) | 3.50/2.95 |
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| Adv Superman 505 (1st) | 2.50/1.95 |
| Superman is reunited with Lois! | |
| Man of Steel 26 (1st) | 1.50/1.25 |
| Superman 82 (Collector) | 3.50/2.95 |
| Superman returns! Holografx cover! | |

## IMAGE

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| Brigade II 3,4 (Death!!!) | 1.95/1.75 |
| Brigade #0 (Origin - New) | 1.95/1.75 |
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| Darker Image 3,4 (New!) | 2.50/1.95 |
| Deathblow 3 (Jim Lee) | 2.50/1.95 |
| Doom's IV #2 (Pacella art) | 2.50/1.95 |
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| Genetix 1 (New!) | 2.75/2.25 |
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| Venom Funeral Pyre 3 | 2.95/2.50 |
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| Wolverine vs. Punisher 1 | 2.00/1.75 |
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# image

These new Image titles are hot!

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| Gen-X #1 (New!) | 2.50/1.95 |
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| Action 692 (1st Print) | 1.50/1.25 |
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| Adv Superman 501-504* | 1.50/1.25 |
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| Introducing an all new team of heroes by Jim Lee! | |
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Image

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| Eternal Warrior 15,16 | 2.25/1.75 |
| Harbinger 22,23 (Hot!) | 2.50/1.95 |
| Hard Corps 11,12 | 2.25/1.75 |
| Magnus 29,30 | 2.25/1.75 |
| Rai & Future Force 14,15 | 2.25/1.75 |
| Secret Weapons 2,3 | 2.25/1.75 |
| Shadowman 18,19 | 2.50/1.95 |
| Solar 26,27 | 2.25/1.75 |
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